BIRTHS,

DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES.

VOL. I.

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BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SAYINGS & DOINGS;" "MAXWELL;" "JACK BRAG;"

&c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES.

CHAPTER I.

"You are a very wise gentleman!—and a very fine gentleman!—at least in your own conceit: nevertheless, 'Pride will have a fall,'—and you and your daughter will live to repent what you are doing: *that* you may rely upon. However, it is no affair of mine: I don't care, it won't hurt *me*."

So said Mr. Jacob Batley to his brother John, during one of many discussions in which they were in the habit of indulging, touching their worldly pursuits. Jacob was a merchant who had made a fortune and retired. John, a younger son, had entered life in a Government-

office, had held place under a feverish administration, and had for some time represented one of those select but judicious constituencies to which the nation is indebted for its final knowledge of the merits and powers of such men as Pitt and Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Brougham, Romilly, and indeed of all men of genius and ability, against whom the doors of the House of Commons would have been closed if each of their discriminating patrons had not chanced to have a private key of them in their pockets.

The different courses which the brothers had pursued had naturally produced a wide and striking difference in their habits and manners, their modes of thinking and of acting. Jacob, who had stuck to the shop till it grew into a warehouse and he himself was transformed from a trader to a merchant, was one of those men who are coiled, as it were, within themselves, and, like that little animal which is classically known and delicately called the *Oniscus Armadillo*, roll themselves up out of harm's way the moment anything like trouble or danger approaches.

John, on the contrary, was polished, politic, and plausible: he could promise with fluency, and refuse with grace and elegance. He had flirted, and loved, and married a beauty, who had left him a widower with one daughter. All he had to live upon was the well-merited pension which his services had secured him; nor had he, in more profitable times, done any-thing in the way of what Jacob called "laying by something for a rainy day," so that his beautiful and accomplished child, besides her face, figure, and accomplishments, had nothing in the way of fortune except that which her uncle Jacob at his death might bequeath her.

Hence the frequent invitations of Jacob to John's house; hence the passive submission with which John heard the lectures of his wealthy relation, feeling at the same time for all his worldly maxims and prudential recommendations the most sovereign contempt.

Jacob was perfectly aware of the inducements which actuated John in all his proceedings towards him, and chuckled at his own perception, and perhaps at the anticipation of

the disappointment of his brother's expectations, which, after all, might occur.

"I tell you, Jack," continued Jacob, "you are wrong—it is nothing to *me;* but it's all nonsense filling the girl's head with notions of high connexions and titles, and all such trumpery—your carriages and your horses, and your dinners—psha!—you can't afford it; and what's worse, you sin with your eyes open—you *know* you can't afford it."

"My dear brother," said John, who seldom ventured to call his impracticable relation by his Christian name, "I really do nothing more than is expected of a man holding a certain place in society."

"Expected by whom?" said Jacob.

"The world," replied John.

"The world!" said Jacob—"umph! You mean the two or three hundred families that live up in this part of the town, not one of whom would care if you and your daughter were barred-up in Newgate. The world!—what would the world do for your child if you were to die in debt, as you will? You are

insolvent now, and you know it. All these trumpery things about your rooms that have cost you mints of money, wouldn't fetch five-and-twenty per cent. of their prime cost at auction whenever you break-up or die."

"Nay, but"——

"'Nay, but,'" said Jacob—"that 's it: you won't hear reason. Have you insured your life?"

"Why, there 's a difficulty," said John——

"To be sure," interrupted Jacob: "you have ruined your constitution by early dissipation, and now your life 's not worth a farthing."

"But, my dear brother," said John, "it would be impossible to bring Helen forward if I did not indulge a little in the gaieties of the world."

"There goes 'the world' again," said Jacob: "I 'm sick of the word."

"When my girl is established," said John, "I shall, of course, alter the whole establishment, and live quietly."

"But how is she to *be* established?" said Jacob. "She has no money; and where are

you to find the man who will take her as he would buy a doll, without a dump? She might marry one man I know of, and he right well to do. To be sure, he is rather old, blinking a little as to his eyes, and a bit gone in his mind, — but that's just it. The alderman, I do think" ——

"The alderman!" said John, casting a withering look at his brother — "Helen marry an alderman!"

"Yes, and jump to get him," said Jacob. "What better do you propose?"

"Why," said John, looking carefully round the room, and finally closing one of the doors which stood half-open, "she has two lovers at this very moment—both capital matches. You see them here constantly, — one, Lord Ellesmere, and the other, Colonel Mortimer. The genuineness of her character, and the openness of her disposition, render the concealment of her feelings a very serious effort; and, as I leave her free and uncontrolled in the exercise of her judgment in such matters, it is not difficult for me to pronounce that Mortimer is her favourite."

"Colonel Mortimer," said Jacob, "is the man, I think, who ran away with somebody's wife—plays a good deal, runs horses, sails yachts, and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"It is the same Colonel Mortimer," said John, "who did all these things, but so entirely changed, that not a vestige of his former character remains. He married the lady, who, in point of fact, ran away with *him*: they subsequently lived happily together, in the most domestic manner, and he nearly died of an illness brought on by the loss of her."

"Very fine—very fine indeed!" said Jacob: "that 's *your* version of the history, is it? He runs away with his friend's wife; they live domestically—that is, because 'the world' won't visit her; she dies—perhaps of a broken heart,—and he is near going off the same way from remorse: mayn't that be true? It 's all nothing to me; nothing will ever break *my* heart; and I never mean to run away with anybody's wife: only, if *I* had a daughter, I would sooner cut her legs off than let her marry such a man."

"I assure you," said John, "that I have

spoken upon this very subject to one or two women of the world"——

"'The world!'—there you go again."

"Well, but what I mean is, women who really understand the ways of society, and they all agree in the eligibility of the match; and since you doubt the possibility of Helen, without a fortune, marrying a rich man, I may as well say at once that Mortimer has at least ten thousand a-year unincumbered."

"That 's it," said Jacob—"there it is. Now I see; you sell your daughter for her share of ten thousand a-year."

"Nay, but," said John, "if Helen is attached to him—if the affection be mutual, surely the ten thousand pounds per annum are not objections to her marrying the man who has them."

"Not if the man were what a girl ought to love," said Jacob. "Now, Alderman Haddock *is* a man"——

"My dear brother," said John, "if you are not joking, do not talk of such a thing."

"A quiet, comfortable establishment,—

everything her own way," said Jacob: "a capital house in Bedford Square, with a nice garden behind, and a beautiful villa close by Hornsey Wood."

"Your picture is tempting, I admit," said John; "but I fear the pursuits of such a life would not be congenial."

"Congenial,—pah!" said Jacob: "I 've done. *I* can't marry a rake, and have my heart broken: of course, it 's nothing to *me*. I don't care three straws for anybody in the world; only, if I could have got the girl out of harm's way, and settled her snug and comfortable, it would have been a good job. However, that 's over; let her marry the Colonel. I know no ill of him; he never cheated me out of *my* money—never shall: not to be had. I have no daughter—that's another good thing: however, I 'll tell Haddock he has no chance."

"What!" said John, "did he ever think he had?"

"Think!" said Jacob, "what should an alderman who has passed the chair, think?—why, exactly as I do—that she would not have

hesitated a moment. However, it 's nothing to me: *I* can't marry an alderman, so I don't care; only" ——

Now, the truth is, that the younger of the two middle-aged Messrs. Batley would infinitely rather have seen his daughter starve than marry her to this Alderman Haddock; and of this the elder of the Messrs. Batley was perfectly aware: and another truth is, that Helen herself participated most cordially in her father's feelings. Jacob, however, felt it his duty to himself to express his opinion and make his suggestions, inasmuch as the manner in which the one was treated and the others were received would fully justify him in doing as he pleased with the fortune which he had himself acquired by his industry.

Her uncle Jacob was no great favourite of Helen's. His rough, almost uncouth manners ill-agreed with her notions of society; and his appearance in the domestic circle, when it happened to be enlivened by any of her more worldly acquaintances, was extremely disagreeable. Nor did the constant efforts of her well-

bred-father entirely succeed in concealing this feeling from Jacob himself: it was therefore doubly important to him, if possible, to secure a *parti* for the young lady, whose fortune might enable him to remove her from the chance of becoming dependent upon his worthy brother. Every day convinced him more and more of the importance of such an arrangement, inasmuch as every day, as it passed, threw some new light upon his daughter's disinclination towards her uncle, from whom, it should be observed, not a syllable or monosyllable in the way of promise, or even hint at the probable disposition of his great wealth, had ever dropped.

The period then had arrived when the lovely Miss Batley found at her feet two pretenders to her hand — and heart. Lord Ellesmere was dull, heavy, and, if he had not been a lord, would most probably have been reckoned stupid. He had, however, as all dull, heavy lords have, his admirers, his puffers, his toadies, and his followers ; but, whatever they might say of his morals and his virtues, it went

but a very little way to counteract the move-ments of the gay and gallant Colonel Morti-mer. It is true, the title and coronet were in one scale, and nothing but a commoner's for-tune in the other; still the fortune was consi-derable, and thus it was that Helen lived in a state of perpetual agitation, expecting every day to be called upon to decide between their comparative attractions.

Batley was a Whig — Lord Ellesmere a vio-lent Tory. The Colonel sympathized in politics with Batley, and this was an additional claim in his favour; besides which, his agreeable manners and conversational qualities rendered him particularly acceptable as a son-in-law. In short, Batley had more than implied to Helen which way his prepossession lay; and even if he had not, the warmth with which he uniform-ly received her untitled suitor must have con-vinced her, as, in fact, it had convinced every-body of their acquaintance, that *he* was the husband elect, as far as the future father-in-law was concerned.

And now for Helen herself: — she was beau-

tiful, highly accomplished, and naturally gifted. Constantly associated with her father since her mother's death, her mind had naturally received its impressions from *him*: her views of "the world," as her uncle Jacob would sneeringly have said, were in perfect accordance with *his*; and the result of this sympathy and similarity of feeling was, the acquirement of a tone of thought and conversation which, to strangers who did not know the excellence of her heart, gave her an air of what might be colloquially called, "off-handishness." But below the surface lay the precious metal of which her character was really formed. She was kind, generous, liberal, and good, in the fullest sense of all these words; but her playfulness and gaiety of manner, generally delighting and captivating as they were, not unfrequently met with the reproof of some, while they dazzled the eyes of many, even to a blindness to the mild radiance of her innate merits and virtues.

Helen had, before she was eighteen, been flattered, praised, and almost beatified. Odes had been written on her eyes, and sonnets

addressed to her eyebrows: ponderous lines "To Helen Dancing," and elaborated extempores "On Hearing Helen Sing," had graced the Annuals. Helen had been painted by Lawrence, drawn by Chalon, enamelled after Lawrence by Bone, engraved after Chalon by Finden, mezzotinted by Cousins, and lithographed by Lane. Dances had been dedicated to her, and collections of poems inscribed to her: in short, all that could have well been done to turn the head of a young lady of her time of life had been tried,—and yet Helen remained, in fact, unspoiled.

It was quite clear to "the world," about the period at which Jacob and John maintained the conversation with which this volume begins, that the suspense in which they, as well as the two parties more intimately concerned, were kept with regard to Miss Helen's selection, must very speedily be terminated. For once "the world" was right: the initiative was taken by the young lady some three nights afterwards at an assembly, where Lord Ellesmere became so "very particular" in his manner and

conversation to Helen, that she was compelled to convince him, in the most unequivocal manner, of the hopelessness of his case,—a determination on her part which was formally ratified the next morning by her fond parent, who thus saw the last obstacle to the consummation of his wishes with regard to Mortimer removed. It is not often that a father, especially one of such pretensions as Mr. John Batley, rejoices in the rejection of a lord by a "gentle belle" who happens to be his daughter; personal esteem, however, and the belief that Helen's happiness would be more unequivocally secured by her union with his lordship's rival, were the bases upon which his satisfaction was founded: and when the disconsolate Baron drove from the door for the last time, Mr. John Batley kissed Helen's flushed cheek in a manner perfectly indicative of his full sanction of, and entire concurrence in, the line of conduct she had adopted.

Strange to say, that on the day in which this eventful rejection took place, Colonel Mortimer did not call in Grosvenor Street. Helen waited, and lingered. The horses were at the

door, — her father ready to accompany her : — she declined riding, insinuating something about an apparent indelicacy in showing herself so immediately after having broken a heart. Dressing-time came :—no Mortimer! Dinner-time : —no Mortimer! What could have happened? Surely she could not have deceived herself into a false belief of his affection for her : surely Papa (a man of the world) could not have so widely miscalculated as not to have assured himself of the seriousness of his intentions. Had his absence anything to do with Lord Ellesmere's rejection, or with her conduct the preceding evening? That Lord Ellesmere was rejected, seemed to be the only certainty in the midst of all these speculations—that was, of course, irrevocable — but if Mortimer should really intend nothing? — what else could it mean? — Helen began to think that she had been hasty. Lord Ellesmere, to speak considerately, was not so very stupid a companion —nor so very violent a politician ; and, at all events, he *was* a Peer, and his wife would be a Peeress : — and Helen was out of spirits, and

even went the full length of crying for vexation at what had happened.

Mr. John Batley most assuredly did not cry, —but Mr. John Batley was particularly uneasy: still, Colonel Mortimer never could have gone so far in his attentions, and even professions, as he had, unless—— And yet,—to be sure, there might still remain a dash of the *roué* in his character. He had the reputation of being a lady-killer, — and it certainly looked odd: —it might have happened that he had heard of what had occurred in the family, and had thought proper to retire as soon as he found the field his own. In short, it was altogether an unaccountable, and by no means an agreeable circumstance. No man alive was more likely to feel deeply the frustration of his designs in such a matter than Batley: the mortification of being deceived by appearances, would of itself be a deadly pang, — for Batley was, at least in his own opinion, extremely like Ben Johnson's Bias,

> "The very agate
> Of State and Policy; cut from the quar'
> Of Machiavel, a true Cornelian

> As Tacitus himself; and to be made
> The brooch to any true State-cap in Europe.
> He is unvaluable. All the Lords
> Have him in that esteem, for his Relations,
> Corrants, Avisos, Correspondences
> With this Ambassador, and that Agent. He
> Will screw you a secret from a Statist
> So easie as some Cobbler worms a dog."

To have been out-manœuvred by the Colonel would naturally lie heavy on his heart; and such were the irascible feelings by which he was agitated, that the night closed upon him with a determination on his part to demand an explanation of conduct which seemed so entirely irreconcileable with honour and the ways of "the world."

Poor Helen's thoughts were differently directed. Her affection for Mortimer was warm and sincere; the extraordinary evidence of his neglect, so suddenly inflicted, agitated her dreadfully; and the womanly mortification, which in the day had been excited by wounded pride, was transformed before the next morning into an agonizing conviction that she had eternally lost the only man she had ever loved.

After a restless, wretched night, came on another day, — but not Mortimer; and neither Helen nor her father, (both equally anxious on the subject,) ventured to propose to the other, any measure calculated to relieve their suspense: even Batley himself, having slept off his chivalrous resolution of the preceding evening, began to consider the inexpediency, if not absurdity, of making an appeal to Mortimer on a subject with regard to which he had made no kind of declaration; and Helen, whose heart beat rapidly during the ceremonial of breakfast, would have suffered it to break before she would consent to take any step which could, by the remotest possibility, be supposed by "the world" to arise from a wish to recall her truant lover.

The suspense, however, which was so irksome, was very speedily converted into a certainty, which was something worse. The arrival of that invaluable record of all "worldly" proceedings, "The Morning Post" newspaper, settled the question. In its fashionable columns appeared the following paragraph, the

perusal of which, in spite of all efforts at repression of feeling, drove Mr. Batley into an agony of rage, and threw Miss Helen into something very like a fit of hysterics.

"Colonel Mortimer left London yesterday for Brighton, on his way to Dieppe, from which place he proceeds on a lengthened tour through the continent of Europe."

This of itself would have been quite sufficient to produce even more serious effects, but, as the French say, "*Malheur ne vient jamais seul;*" and just as Jack had soothed his daughter into a state of consciousness, and resolved to re-read the "extremely disagreeable" announcement previously to discussing it, his eyes, missing their aim at the particular passage, just glanced upon another which was about half a superficial inch lower down in the column, and read—

"It is confidently reported that Lord Ellesmere is immediately to be created an Earl."

This was something beyond endurance— beyond belief, indeed! The first impression upon Batley's mind was, that the circumstance

could not be accidental—that some malicious demon had placed the two articles of intelligence in juxta-position, and perhaps invented them both. Ay, —if *that* were true: — the drowning man caught at the straw — but it saved him not; — both the recorded facts were incontrovertible.

"Did you see *this*, Helen?" said Batley to his daughter.

"See it!— yes," said Helen, believing that her excited parent alluded to the defection of the Colonel.

"The idea of making *him* an earl!" said Batley—"what will they do next?"

"What!— who an earl?" said Helen.

"Your discarded friend Ellesmere," was the reply, and "The Morning Post" was handed to Helen, in order that she might satisfy herself upon that point; her tear-dimmed eyes, however, rested instinctively upon the one loved word: with Isabel she could have said—

> "Walk forth, my loved and gentle Mortimer,
> And let these longing eyes enjoy their feast."

But, alas! *her* "loved and gentle Mortimer"

was now beyond her reach—beyond recall; and when she came in time to read the announcement of his rival's approaching elevation in the peerage, she felt no pang of regret like that her father had endured, at the loss of rank she had sustained by her rejection of his lordship; for, had he been a Prince, and the competitor for her heart with Mortimer, *his* fate and *her* decision would have been the same as it had been.

"It seems, Helen, that something strange has happened," said Batley: —"have you and Mortimer quarrelled?"

"On the contrary," said Helen, who talked fluently in his praise as a friend; "I never saw him in better spirits, or in better temper, than on Wednesday morning when he was here."

"Did you see him at Lady Saddington's?" said Batley.

"No," replied Helen: "he said he should be there, and perhaps was; but, you know, I came away early, and he is generally very late."

"Yes," said Batley. "I begin to wish that you had not been quite so decisive: Elles-

mere is a man not to be rejected — and ——
but, however, we certainly were not aware of
this."

"My dearest father," said Helen, "let what
may be the result, I never shall, — never can
repent the course I have adopted. You have
taught me to speak to you frankly upon all
topics affecting my happiness, and I have no
disguises from you. I never could have altered
the sentiments I at this moment entertain for
Lord Ellesmere, and I am sure it would have
been unkind, as well as indelicate, to have permitted him to continue in doubt upon the subject one moment longer, after what occurred at
that party."

"I find no fault, Helen," said Batley; "I
have always desired you to think for yourself:
but still it appears to me, that however sincere
you may have been in the expression of your
feelings towards the man who is indifferent to
you, you have been less candid with regard to
him who, if I know anything of "the world"
generally, and of you particularly, occupies a
very different place in your estimation."

"Equally sincere, believe me, my dear father," said Helen. "I never disguised,—in fact, there was no reason why I should disguise the pleasure I derived from the society of Colonel Mortimer. From all you had said, I concluded that you had no objection to his constant visits here, and therefore, so far from affecting an indifference which I did not feel, I have treated him in a manner perfectly consistent with the opinion I entertained of him."

"And now, tell me, Helen," said Batley,—"in the course of your numerous conversations has he ever alluded,—seriously, I mean,—to the probable result of your intimate acquaintance?—has he, in fact, led you to believe that that result would be a proposal of a similar nature to that of Lord Ellesmere?—or"——

"Why, my dear father," said Helen, "Mortimer's manner, and conversation, and accomplishments, are all so exceedingly unlike those of Lord Ellesmere, that it is impossible for me to establish a comparison between them in my mind. Mortimer, as far as I am concerned, has never practised what 'the world,' I be-

lieve, calls making love. He is extremely agreeable—delightful!—and I tell you very honestly, I never saw anybody I liked so much; —and I—am——In fact, my dear father, you have seen the progress of our intimacy,—and I—admit the—"——.

And here Helen, who had endeavoured with all her energy to keep up this description of her feelings with every possible gaiety, and had so far, to a certain extent, succeeded, fell into a second hysteric fit, the aggravated symptoms of which, rendered it necessary to ring for her maid, with whose assistance and that of her father she was removed to her room.

When Batley had assured himself of his daughter's convalescence, and that rest and quiet only were essential to her restoration, he proceeded to his library, to think over what had happened, and, if possible, decide upon his future course of proceeding. The marriage of his daughter to Mortimer was the great object of his ambition, and he had now for some time so perfectly satisfied himself that things were *en train*, and going on as well as possible,

that the sudden shock occasioned by the departure of the lover, as he had considered him, was not at all alleviated by Helen's description of the nature and character of his attentions, and he began to apprehend that the tender feeling in the *affair* was confined to Helen. That would, and did, naturally account for her decided rejection of Lord Ellesmere: —might it not equally account for the disappearance of Mortimer? Might he not, seeing the marked attentions which the noble lord was paying to Helen, with an evident, and, in all probability, avowed object in view, consider himself, having no such intentions, bound in honour to withdraw?

Batley began to fear that, for once, his knowledge of "the world" had failed him, and that he ought himself earlier to have brought Mortimer to some definite point; now, it seemed wholly impracticable: he had no ground, no plea for asking him a single question touching the matter,—except, indeed, that the quitting London without either mentioning his intention, or calling to take leave of the family, putting

all lover-like considerations out of the question, might justify his writing him a friendly letter of inquiry into the reason of his abruptness, in which Helen should only be mentioned incidentally. This seemed a bright thought, and the *diplomate* resolved to act upon it immediately; and in order to begin his operations scientifically and in good order, he proceeded forthwith, after hearing a favourable account of his daughter's progress towards recovery, to call at the hotel whence Colonel Mortimer had taken his departure the preceding day.

The reader will please to recollect that he has been introduced to the diplomatic Mr. Batley under very peculiar circumstances; that he has been domesticated with him in the first instance; and that, as the proverb says, "No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre," so no man is, as he is in "the world" while engaged in family-affairs with his own connexions and relations. Once out of his own house,—once afloat in the full tide of London-life, Batley was a different creature altogether; and those of his acquaintance whom he chanced to

meet on his way to Mortimer's hotel, every one of whom would have been too happy to take his arm and enjoy his conversation, could by no possibility form an idea of the real state of his mind, or of what was passing in it, while he, with smiles upon his countenance, and an air of gaiety and playfulness of manner, was positively distracted at the idea of losing such a prize as a husband for his daughter, who, by one of those singular coincidences that rarely occur in "the world," was equally agreeable to father and child.

Arrived at the hotel, Jack made his inquiries after the Colonel, as if he expected to find him at home.

"The Colonel left town yesterday, sir," was the answer.

"That's very odd," said Batley. "What time?"

"About half-past one, sir," said the waiter.

"Leave any letters or messages, or"——

"None, sir," said the waiter.

"Gone to Brighton?" said Jack.

"Yes, sir," replied the man — "gone to Brighton first, and then to France."

"When do you expect him back?" said Mr. Batley.

"I don't think, sir, the Colonel will be back for some time," said the waiter.

"His servants all gone?" asked Batley.

"No, sir," said the waiter, "his groom and the boy are not gone yet: they stay with the saddle-horses, I believe."

"Ah!" said Batley — "where are they — here?"

"At the stables, I fancy, sir," said the man.

"Umph!" said Batley, pausing for a moment to consider what advantage was probably derivable from any inquiries in that quarter, — for Jack was of that school which has for an axiom, the justification of the means by the attainment of the object — "Ha — well — then I'll write. — Does not go immediately to France?"

"I think not, sir," said the waiter, "for a day or two."

"Oh!" said Jack—"thank you—thank you!"—and away he went, leaving the waiter deeply impressed with the urbanity of his manners and the extreme politeness of his behaviour. And whither went he?—the reader anticipates, I am sure:—to the stables!—from the inmates of which he felt a hope that he might derive the most authentic information on the subject nearest his heart.

Thither he repaired, and amidst the washing of carriages, the clatter of pail-handles, and the auxiliary hissings of sundry harness-cleaners, the anxious parent ascertained that Colonel Mortimer had ordered that his horses should be sent down to his country residence, Sadgrove House, in Worcestershire; that the carriage-horses were already gone, and that the saddle-horses were to follow the next day.

Hence did the diplomatist discover that Mortimer's absence was not likely to be a temporary one, and that, for once, the newspapers were correct in their statement, the reason probably being that the Colonel's own man had furnished it, leaving "the world" to

wonder what could so suddenly have caused the occultation of so bright a planet in the hemisphere of Fashion. The conclusion discoverable from this intelligence was of the most disagreeable kind; but it nevertheless strengthened, and before he reached home confirmed him in his determination of not losing a friend so estimable, and a companion so agreeable, as the Colonel, without one effort either to regain him or ascertain the cause of his defection. Accordingly, the *diplomate* sat himself down, and wrote him the following letter.

"My dear Mortimer, Grosvenor Street.

'I had a dream, which was not all a dream;
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander, darkling, in the eternal space,
Rayless and pathless.'

'The world' is in 'amazement lost!'—all London is wondering whither you are gone, and why. We are, in fact, in a total eclipse: some folks surmise that you have not gone alone: for myself, I cannot comprehend the matter, or its suddenness. Surely, if some

fancy had struck you on the minute, you would not have gone without saying 'farewell' to us. *We* cannot have offended you, even if any one else has done so; and I cannot suffer you to go farther than you have already gone, without endeavouring to catch some little account of your plans for the future, and of the cause — that is, if you are not resolved to mystify the metropolis altogether — which has produced so surprising an effect.

"To me the news of your departure seemed incredible. One reason for my incredulity was, the account of its appearing somewhat authoritatively in the newspapers; and the other was, our not having received the least intimation of it from yourself, which, as Helen and I were vain enough to think ourselves something like favourites with you, has given us both a great deal of uneasiness.

"Pray write, even if it be but five lines, to let us hear what you propose doing, and whither, in fact, you are going. I admit that I am extremely anxious, because I honestly confess that I feel deeply interested in your pro-

ceedings; and trust that your strange departure is not in any way connected with the disagreements among the trustees of your Welsh property, about which you were good enough to consult me. In fact, we miss you, and want exceedingly to know, why. Even poor little Fan seems to inquire after you as earnestly as Italian greyhound well can; and Helen declares that something must have affronted you. For our parts, neither I nor Helen, nor even the affectionate Italian, are conscious of having done so, and therefore those of the trio who think and recollect, are most anxious to know the real cause of your disappearance. If there should be anything in which my humble services can be made available, do not hesitate to let me know, and I will put myself at your disposal immediately.

"[illegible] desires her best remembrances, and adds her request to mine, that you should write by return of post, to give a true and faithful account of yourself. Pray do, and believe me, dear Mortimer,

"Yours, faithfully and sincerely,

"J. Batley."

"P. S. — I see ministers are going to create Ellesmere an Earl:—what will they do next? He is no longer a visitor here; so that not having seen him in the course of the day, I am not certain whether the rumour is correct."

This letter having been first submitted to Helen, who saw nothing unreasonable, remarkable, or indelicate in its contents, and who especially admired, if she did not actually originate, the postscript, was despatched in the evening to Brighton, which place in due course it reached the following morning. The effect produced by it upon the gallant Colonel remains to be seen.

CHAPTER II.

Helen Batley, whose career is likely to occupy a considerable portion of the reader's attention, was singularly situated in society. From a combination of circumstances, connected in some degree with her father's wifeless condition, she possessed few, if any, female friends of her own age. She had been confided to the care of chaperons, who were either unmarried elderlies, or widows without families; and her father's house, ungraced and uncheered by the presence of a mistress, seemed to serve rather as a temporary retreat from the gaieties of "the world," than a home, under the roof of which might be associated companions of her own sex likely to sympathize with her, and become the recipients of the unreserved communication of her thoughts and feelings.

Neither were those to whom her volatile and restless father entrusted her, exactly the sort of persons to whom such a trust could advantageously be delegated; and certainly, of the whole *coterie*, the one least likely to do her good was the one whose society she most preferred. This, perhaps, was natural, inasmuch as she was never troubled by her favourite maternal friend with anything in the shape of advice, except as to the colour of a riband, or the texture of a dress. Lady Bembridge was a woman of "the world," as uncle Jacob would have said, who lived but for such pleasures as it could still afford to a widow of sixty. A good jointure without children, an excellent house, and a turn for ostentatious hospitality, combined to procure for her a constant round of gaiety and entertainment, in running which, her great object was to be universally popular. She was always a flatterer, and never, by the remotest accident, dealt in personalities: she always spoke hypothetically, and generally hypocritically. To be everything to everybody was her object, and therefore it is not to be ima-

gined that she would even hazard the favourable opinion of Helen by intruding anything in the shape of corrective observation upon her. Advice, like medicine, is never palatable; and Lady Bembridge was like the fashionable physician who first ascertains what his patient would like to eat or to drink, or what part of the world he would like to visit, before he prescribes, and then prudently directs the unconscious sufferer to do the very thing he himself wishes to do: a course of proceeding rendered more beneficial to the invalid by convincing him that his own views of his complaint, of course always favourable, are in strict accordance with those of Sir Gregory Galen, or Sir Peter Paracelsus, as the case may be.

On the morning of Batley's visit to Mortimer's hotel and stables, Lady Bembridge, much as usual, called on Helen, in order to "make arrangements," as her phrase went, for the day. In a moment she saw that Helen had been crying: she knew that Mortimer was gone, — therefore did her ladyship affect not to perceive the tear-marks in her eyes, or to

own her knowledge of the Colonel's sudden departure.

"It seems to me, Helen dear," said her ladyship, "as if this evening would be a very good opportunity for the play. We have no engagement; we might dine early, and if a comfortable box were to be let, probably it might be agreeable."

"My dear Lady Bembridge," said Helen, "I could not go to the play if you were to give me the world!"

"I am sure," said Lady Bembridge, "I am not going to ask why; but I *did* think, that when young ladies avow themselves admirers of certain authors, there could be no great objection to their indulging themselves in seeing their best works well acted."

"Plays," said Helen, "are all very well; they interfere, however, with everything else: and—I don't know—the men who act Comedy are so vulgar; and,—as—as for Tragedy, one has enough of *that* in real life, without going to a theatre for it."

"I am sure, my dear Helen," said Lady

Bembridge, "I am the last person in the world, as you know, to inquire how much of tragedy mingles in the occurrences of *your* life; but I should really think, dear, if any-thing unpleasant were to occur to any young friend of mine, placed in 'the world' as you are, it must be — I know, Helen, you will par-don me, love!—it must be her own fault."

"Oh! my dear Lady Bembridge," said Helen, "indeed, indeed it is not so! No: what has happened is *not* my fault. Dear Lady Bembridge, I will tell you all: I am unhappy — and unhappy without having done any one single thing in the world justly to make me so. Mortimer is gone to France — gone on a tour!"

"You do not really mean that!" said Lady Bembridge, with an expression of surprise which would have done credit to the talents of a professional actress.

"True, — quite true!" said Helen: "isn't it strange!—isn't it wonderful!"

"Why, my love," said Lady Bembridge, "one cannot, you know, form an opinion hast-

ily upon an individual case: but—now, dearest, you will see what I mean in a minute—if a very lovely girl, of about your age,—in fact, just such a girl as yourself,—encourages two men,—at least, when I say encourages, I mean, suffers the attentions of two men,—one a nobleman much distinguished in society, and the other a commoner equally celebrated in 'the world,' without coming to a decision, is it not possible that patience may wear out? and—I don't mean to say"——

"No, no,—I know you don't, dear!" said Helen, who, when she became animated or impassioned, so called the dowager; "but I did no such thing. You know all about it; you know every turn of my mind; you know that I did decide about Lord Ellesmere; else, my dear Lady Bembridge, why did I implore you to come away from Lady Saddington's?"

"My dearest!" said her ladyship, taking Helen's hand between her's, "I didn't know anything about it. Sometimes girls have headaches, or are tired; and when I am *chaperon*. I never ask why they wish me to stay late or

come away early. When one sees an avowed lover, such as Lord Ellesmere has been of yours, making one of the retiring party, it is impossible to know."

"What could I do?" said Helen: "he *would* offer me one of his arms, and you the other: I could not make a scene in Lady Saddington's ante-room. But I told you, my dear Lady Bembridge,"——

"No, Helen dear," said Lady Bembridge, "you told me nothing. A young lady who tells me that she has been very much flurried, and in a state of agitation so peculiar that she wishes to go home, only tells me that something particularly interesting to her, has occurred, and I am left to conjecture of what particular sentiment the agitation has been indicative. I never knew, till this moment, the real truth of the story: — so, then, Ellesmere is discarded."

"Yes," said Helen —"but then Mortimer is gone! — and oh! my dear Lady Bembridge, if I have lost him by my own want of decision, — my own missishness rather, in liking to have lovers in order to teaze them and please my-

self, I never can have a moment's happiness for the rest of my life!"

"My dear Helen," said the old lady, "you must not talk in this way: I am quite sure you have nothing to reproach yourself with. To be sure, a man like Colonel Mortimer, taken even with all his imperfections on his head, is not to be found every day; and when a young lady feels conscious that she has secured the heart of such a man, not to speak of his fortune, which, I am sure, is the last thing in the world such a girl as you would think about, she ought not to risk her own happiness and his by apparent indecision: but this does not apply to your case, dear!"

"I cannot help thinking it does," said Helen, "nor can I help reproaching myself with a thousand little coquettish tricks of which I ought to have been ashamed. You know, my dear Lady Bembridge, this must have been the case, or how could Lord Ellesmere have, to the very last, fancied himself the favourite?"

"You must not agitate yourself," said Lady Bembridge. "Rely upon it, if a man like

Colonel Mortimer were really attached to such a young lady as Miss Batley, and had withdrawn himself only because he thought a rival preferred, he would, on ascertaining that that rival was dismissed, instantly return, and kneel to receive his fetters again: he couldn't help himself."

"Not," said Helen, "if he had by any chance discovered that the young lady had been playing a double game.—And that *I* should be that young lady, whose leading faults in 'the world' have hitherto been sincerity and frankness! I never was reproached with anything very wrong, except speaking my mind too freely; and yet —yet—here I have *not* been sincere."

"You see this matter in a wrong point of view," said Lady Bembridge. "Follow my advice; come and take a drive. Let us engage the box, and let us go to the play. A young lady whose avowed admirer has suddenly left town on a tour, ought not to permit 'the world' to suppose that she is affected by it."

"But I am affected by it," said Helen, and

the tears ran down her cheeks, "and I cannot conceal my sorrow, even if I wished it!"

Lady Bembridge looked at her young friend with a half-serious, half-comic worldly look, and pressing her hand, said archly, as dowagers sometimes will say things—

"'The boy thus, when his sparrow's flown,
The bird in silence eyes;
But soon as out of sight, 'tis gone,
Whines, whimpers, sobs, and cries.'"

"Lady Bembridge!" said Helen, starting from her chair, "you know I cannot bear to be laughed at!" and in the next instant she was out of the room, leaving the *chaperon* as much surprised at the rapidity of the young lady's movements, as at the ill-success of her extremely ill-timed attempt at pleasantry.

Helen, however, was seriously wounded by what had occurred, and upon a mind like hers, the combination of feelings, — some perhaps not quite so amiable as others which the circumstance had excited, — operated violently. She had lost the lover of her choice, and she had discarded his rival whose peerage was at

her feet; and, as has been already observed, beyond and over-and-above the one deep grief which the former of these circumstances created, was the worldly regret that she should have thrown away the advantages of the match with Lord Ellesmere for the sake of the man who had evidently abandoned her. All this worry, and excitement produced an accession of fever; and after Lady Bembridge, who followed her to her room, had obtained pardon for her endeavour to laugh off her sorrows and remorse, she took her leave, promising to send her own favourite physician to visit her, observing as she went, "that however incompetent the doctors might be to 'minister to a mind diseased,' still they were of great service in checking bodily illness caused by mental excitement."

Helen, for the first time in the course of their acquaintance, rejoiced at her ladyship's departure. The silence of her room which succeeded to the voluble hypotheses of her "worldly" companion was of itself soothing and calming, and the poor victim to her own inde-

cision uninterruptedly indulged in an ecstasy of tears.

It was during this time that another scene in the domestic drama was being enacted in Mr. John Batley's library, where brother Jacob, having heard the history of Mortimer's flight and Lord Ellesmere's rejection, made not a second, nor a third, but at least a twentieth effort to induce Jack to listen to Alderman Haddock's proposals for the dear deserted Dido.

"Psha, Jack!" said Jacob, "I told you so:— cat in a tripe-shop; —Jack-ass between two bundles of hay:—didn't know where to choose. No difference to *me;* thank God! I have no daughter: I care for nobody: but you'll see the end on't, that's all I say,—and a pretty kettle of fish you 'll make of it!"

It was during such discussions as these, that Jack, the brilliant and polished, had to exercise the most rigid control over his temper, and submit with apparent patience to the *dicta* of the uneducated Crœsus from whom he hoped to derive eventual independence.

"My dear brother," said Batley junior,

"you are altogether misinformed. Colonel Magnus, Mortimer's particular friend and intimate acquaintance, told me this very morning that he doubted the fact of Mortimer's intended absence, and hinted to me—this, of course, is *entre nous*"—

"Of course," said Jacob, "whatever that means."

"Means, Jacob," said John, "why, that it goes no farther. He hinted to me that he rather thought Mortimer had an affair upon his hands, and had given out the history of his tour to mystify inquirers."

"An affair!" said Jacob—"Oh! that means, I suppose, another duel—not that it necessarily follows. An affair of honour!—an affair of gallantry. Ah!—well, you are safe with *me;* I sha'n't say a syllable about it. I don't care a fig if Colonel Mortimer is killed half a dozen times over;—why should I? *I'm* not going to fight, and haven't insured *his* life; it cannot make any difference, you know, to me."

"No," said Jack, "but it would make a very serious difference to Helen."

"Why," said Jacob, "I don't see that. She has contrived to catch two fools already,— why shouldn't she do the same thing again?"

"My dear brother," said Jack, "you speak of female affections as if they were as easily transferred as so much stock."

"Stock, John!" said Jacob—"no, no: you don't catch me comparing the fly-away fancies of a giddy girl with the four per cents, or the three and a-half reduced."

"But the sentiment,—the feeling!" said John.

"Sentiment, my eye!" said Jacob; "I don't understand what it means: I never knew what it was to be in love—never shall, now. I admit that I once took a fancy to a widow at Wapping, in regard of sundry ships, Class A, lying in the London Docks, of which she was mistress; but I found it wasn't all clear and above-board,—and that she had a nephew, and there was a will to be disputed; so I left the widow and the craft:—but as for sentiment,—Lord bless your heart! she was old enough to be my grandmother, and so big that

one of her own puncheons would have made her a tight pair of stays."

"That's it," said Jack; "you have never felt the sort of passion to which I refer, and therefore cannot appreciate its power."

"I suppose I haven't!" said Jacob: "no matter; I shall never want for anybody to love as long as I live — always sure, too, of what you call a return — I love myself. As I say, of all the houses in the street give me Number One — eh? — that's my maxim."

"You *say* so," said John.

"Never say what I don't mean," replied Jacob; — "and another thing I never do: — never try to jump higher than my legs will carry me — d'ye mark me, Jack? There isn't a man, woman, or child to whom I owe tenpence on my private account: I never drink my port till it's paid for: — no running over head and ears in debt, — as you do, Jack: — however, as I've said a hundred times before, it's nothing to me."

"Only, as a brother," said Jack, "you might perhaps take some interest."

"Not I," said Jacob, "I never take any interest—except for my money:—and as for a brother,—why, we are all brothers, if you come to that:—and hang me if I know one of the family, large as the world is, who would stoop to pick up a pin to save *my* life;—I'm sure I wouldn't, to save any one of theirs."

"But, surely," said Jack, "Helen deserves some of your affection: she is truly attached to *you*, and"——

"Fudge, Jack!" said Jacob, rattling all the shillings in his breeches-pocket—"attached to *me!*—no, I'm not after *her* fashion—I don't live in 'the world'—hey? She may be attached to me as Peter Post-Obit in the play is attached to *his* friends, in the hopes of what she may catch at my death:—but it won't do; I'm not to be had! No,—if she were a staid, sensible sort of body, and would marry Haddock, I should say something to her:—but, no—the alderman, like myself, is not a man of 'the world'—not that I care three dumps for *him*, if you come to that."

"Why," said Jack, "Helen's habits and

manners are different from those of the alderman; and an accomplished girl"——

"Accomplished fiddle-stick!" said the merchant. "What are accomplishments? You over-educate your girls — teach them the learned languages — make them dance like figure-girls,—what d'ye call 'em there,— all up and down the sides of the stage at the playhouse, with a fringe to their stays which they call petticoats? — make them play and sing till their hearts ache: — and what for? — to catch husbands: that's it,—isn't it? — And more fools they who are to be so trapped."

"I don't see that," said Jack. "Accomplishments in which amateurs now excel the professors of twenty years since, are"——

"Accomplishments," said the merchant, "stuff! What are the accomplishments? — all very fine as baits — lures — temptations: but once let the accomplished girl be married — see, then, what happens. The husband is gained; a family is coming; and she thinks just as much of twanging her harp, tinkling her guitar, rattling her piano-forte, or colly-

wobbling with her voice, as she does of flying: it's all pretence — fighting under false colours. If Helen married Haddock "——

"My dear Jacob," again interrupted Batley junior ——

"And, my dear Jack," said Jacob, "if you come to *that*. — I say, even if she married this Mortimer — which, in course, she won't now, — she would never sing or play afterwards; nor would he ask her. Everything is very fine till you have got it. A singing wife is like a piping bullfinch; great fun for your friends, — deuced tiresome to yourself. Now, as I am all for myself, and nothing for my friends, I only speak as I think."

"My dear brother," said Jack, "upon one point I really wish to undeceive you, because, in your blunt, off-hand way of speaking, you may unintentionally do Helen and me a very serious piece of mischief, by representing the marriage between her and Mortimer as off. Colonel Magnus, his particular friend, as I have already told you "——

"Psha!" said Jacob, "Colonel Magnus! —

that's another man o' 'the world;' a Brag in good society; a fellow I saw through the first day I met him here:—not but he is clever in his way, for he never brags straightforward, —all his infernal conceit comes out as if by chance, and he leaves you to draw your own conclusions; all his boasting is by implication: but he's an empty-pated fellow, and as conceited as a man-milliner, and not very unlike one."

"Magnus like a man-milliner!" exclaimed Jack, "why, my dear brother, he is absolutely the pattern-man of the day."

"Yes," said Jacob, "that will do; a 'pattern-man!'—just so — so is a man-milliner; — and the bosom friend of Mr. Mortimer! — I know — I understand. I feel what comes of friendships; I never had a friend in my life, thank God! I don't care a farthing about it; but, mark me, *that* Colonel Magnus is most likely to be the man to persuade Mortimer to have nothing to do with Helen."

"On the contrary," said Jack, "he is loud in her praise."

"Loud in her praise!" repeated the brother; "and do you give any man in this world credit for what he says? — psha! The world is full of cheats;—it's a cheat,—a great huge big cheat, itself;—it is that makes me stand aloof from everybody: everybody who makes professions—lies; no man, let him talk as he may, cares one straw for anything but self,—that I know. But I'm even with them: I'm like the dusty chap that lived on the river Dee; "I care for nobody," — not "if nobody cares for me," as the miller says it, but because I know nobody *does* care for me: — so much the better —who wants them?"

It is true that Mr. Jacob Batley had a somewhat forcible manner of expressing his extremely unamiable feelings and principles, but he was a shrewd observer of "things in general," and the estimate he had formed of the merits and virtues of Colonel Magnus was not very far from being a correct one. The Colonel had been long the intimate friend of Mortimer: they had been in the same battalion of Guards, — had lived very constantly together.

Magnus was the *confidant* of Mortimer in that affair to which reference has already been made; he was his adviser in council, and had been his friend in the field: to Magnus, therefore, every incident connected with Mortimer's past life was familiar, and Mortimer would in vain have attempted concealment with *him*:—, moreover, he certainly *did* think that Mortimer might do better than marry the beautiful yet flighty Helen; and perhaps fancied that the blissful retirement to his place in Worcestershire, of which he spoke in raptures as a bower of connubial happiness, might, more than was either agreeable or convenient, separate him from a companion in whose society he very much delighted, and whose London hospitality was particularly agreeable to him.

As to the particular feeling to which Jacob alluded, Jacob was perfectly right. Magnus had but a small fortune, but he had a fine place in the country, in which he could not afford to live; still, he was a man of station, and, (to a certain degree,) of property, however much it might be encumbered. The general

tone of his conversation was such as never to betray him into anything verging upon a falsehood, but to leave his hearers, as Jacob said, to imply and infer that he was really something to be looked-up to. This style of language, combined with a fine person, Antinous-like features, pallid cheeks, an immoveable steadiness and almost scornfulness of countenance, gave him a kind of swaggering importance in general society, in which, it must be owned, he mightily rejoiced. How far his influence over Mortimer, superadded to his knowledge of his foregone indiscretions, contributed to the events hereafter to be detailed, is not at present to be ascertained; suffice it to say, that Colonel Mortimer seldom acted in any important case, without having first asked and received the advice of Colonel Magnus.

It was quite in the natural order of things that nothing like congeniality should exist between the two colonels and such a person as Mr. Jacob Batley. The old citizen, always on the alert, was by far too quick and discerning not

to discover the precise place which he held in their estimation, and this knowledge gave increased force to his natural feelings of misanthropy, or rather self-love, — for the fact is, he did not so much hate other people as love himself.

"Well," said the worthy citizen, "I wish you well out of it. You are in what I call a mess — but you won't take advice, and I can't afford time to waste it upon you if you would: — no, — go your own way, it 's nothing to me: I don't care whether she marries either, both, or neither. I know I have got a deuced good dinner to eat at Haddock's at six, and a capital bottle of Port to drink after it, and a snatch of supper if I want it, and a glass of punch, beyond *that;* and a comfortable bed to go to afterwards, in as snug a house as ever was built — that 's enough for me. I have put myself out of harm 's way — sunk enough in Annuities to keep me safe for the rest of *my* life; and as that 's the case, Jack, blow high, blow low, all 's one to Jacob :—wherefore, good morning! I shall look in to-morrow or next

day. I suppose I shall hear how you get on —not that that's what I come for, only, I like an object when I want a walk, and so I come to inquire—ha, ha! Good b'ye t'ye, Jack — good b'ye!"

"Strange, unaccountable creature!" muttered Jack, as he rang the bell for the servant to let his brother out. "Is it the possession of wealth that steels the heart against mankind, or is it the knowledge, gained by that possession, of the greedy rapacity of the world, which puts the rich man on his guard against its impositions? I, if I ever had a guinea in the world that I could call my own, was never easy till it was gone; and often have I shared it with a poorer friend, or even given it all away to some deserving object,—at least, as I fancied;—and here is this brother of mine, rolling in riches, a perfect callosity as far as sympathy, compassion, or feeling go. Well, I would not change with him even now."

This being spoken in a soliloquy, Jack's effusion, so favourable to himself, will pass uncensured on the score of vanity or vain-boasting:

he said little more than the truth, although the peculiar callosity, as he called it, of Jacob, as far as he himself was concerned, was in some degree attributable to frequent applications for assistance, which Jacob sometimes responded to favourably, because he was afraid his own name might be implicated or disgraced in any exposure of Jack's embarrassments: so, even in any particular exception to his general rule of action, it will be always found that self was still the ruling principle.

In the state of mind into which Mr. John Batley had worked himself during the last six and thirty hours, the sound of an approaching visitor was dreadfully exciting; and just as Jacob had quitted him, his nervous system was violently acted upon by the arrival and announcement of no less a personage than the subject of the recent conversation, Colonel Magnus himself.

"My dear Colonel," said Jack, "I am too glad to see you."

"Why," said the Colonel, "I have called rather to ask your advice, than to bring any

intelligence of our friend, from whom, however, I expect to hear every hour. The fact is, that I have heard you express a wish to be again in Parliament: — now I think I have an opportunity of, — I won't say, returning you, — not actually that, — but of putting things so favourably *en train*, that little doubt can be entertained of success."

"Why," said Jack, his eyes brightening at the prospect of again sitting in the Wittenagemote of the empire, "I admit that I should be disposed to enter into any negociation that way tending, not from any personal vanity, but because I think,—of course what I say is entirely private and confidential,—that I *might* be of use: — I *have been* behind the curtain, and might perhaps turn the experience I have gained to some account in just picking holes in the coats of the — eh! — you understand."

"Perfectly," said the Colonel: "I will state the fact. A large proportion of the electors of Mudbury, the town in the neighbourhood of which a good deal of my Wiltshire property lies, have been long anxious to show any little

attention to me in their power. About a week or ten days ago, some sixty or seventy of them came over to my place, — a thing quite unexpected on my part, — in twenty or thirty carriages; and my man, who announced that they were actually arrived, was the very first person who told me anything at all about it. I immediately said, 'Hawkins,'—my man's name is Hawkins,—I said, 'sixty or seventy of them,—oh!—show them into one of the small drawing-rooms, and immediately have luncheon, or something of the kind, put down in the large dining-room.' I thought that was not a bad precaution: that class of people have a high regard for their personal comforts, and as it is said, by way of national reflection, that Englishmen can finish nothing satisfactorily without a dinner, so I have observed, that they can begin nothing at all comfortably without a luncheon."

"I see," said Jack, "you are quite alive to the little imperfections of our noble countrymen."

"*Au fait*," said Magnus; "else why have I lived so long amongst them, contrary to my

taste and inclination? *N'importe,* these fellows came, and I found that they were merely a deputation from a vast proportion of the electors of Mudbury, pressing me to come forward. Now, the fact is, my dear Batley, you know I have a certain position to maintain, and as far as any of the necessary labours, as I call them, of one's station are concerned, I am quite ready. As high sheriff, why, of course, with a certain degree of influence and property, and all that, in a county—it 's a duty to—to—uphold the office properly, which is, in fact, unavoidable: but the House of Commons, the heat, and the smell, and the late hours which one must keep to be really useful, and the odd sort of hats the people wear—in fact, to me—I declare I could not, in justice, undertake the thing;—I love my ease too much."

"Ah!" said Jack smilingly and bowingly, "there it *is*: that is precisely the reason why things are going to ruin."

"No, Jack," said Magnus, "a vote 's a vote, and I could give no more;—so, feeling that I

was very much obliged to my dirty-faced friends, I gave them a sort of impromptu *déjeûnér*, and made them a speech. They begged me to express myself before the main body of their party at the Town Hall. I immediately ordered my carriage—I happened luckily to have some of my own horses down at the time—put four to, —outriders and that sort of thing,—and went over to Mudbury. Of course, my coming was a thing looked at, and to be talked of; and I think the affair went off remarkably well. I repeated my declaration of ill-health, and all that; and then I was solicited to name a friend: —there is the fact. The thing struck me as likely to be agreeable to you, and—so"——

"'Gad," said Batley, "you are extremely kind. I really am infinitely obliged."

"I thought, perhaps, it might be agreeable," said the Colonel; "I, therefore, told several of my Wiltshire tenants—for, in other counties where I have property, my influence is more decided—that, of course, moving in society as I did, I must know a considerable number of eligible persons to bring forward,

and that I would consult some of those people best qualified to judge with regard to my choice; but, just as I was stepping into my travelling carriage, it struck me that you, perhaps, were the best person in the world for the purpose; I desired Mr. Wilkinson, my *homme d'affaires*, who is quite in my confidence, and who gets through a world of business in the shortest possible time, not to write to the Marquess of Pimlico till I had seen you upon the subject. In fact, I thought it would please you, and I knew it would please Mortimer."

The last observation puzzled Batley a good deal. It seemed quite clear, that if Mortimer had decidedly broken off all connexion with his family, his being either in or out of the House of Commons must be a matter of perfect indifference to him; still, he liked the notion, and looked upon Magnus as a man very little inferior, in fact, to what he was in his own opinion. There was still a point to be touched upon and discussed, the settlement of which was yet wanting to confirm the exalted opinion

which Jack had so suddenly formed of his friend. What that was, may be easily guessed: Was the return to be made free of expense? — or was it expected by the magnificent Colonel that Jack was to secure the favourable opinions of the free and independent electors of Mudbury by any outlay of his own?

Little did Jack, with all his penetration and knowledge of the world, think that the magnificent Colonel's only reason for not sitting himself for that ancient and highly respectable town was, the impossibility of getting elected upon his personal influence alone, and the equally disagreeable impossibility of raising, on his part, a sufficient sum of ready money for the purpose, without making some dreadful sacrifices.

"With regard to the expense," said the Colonel, "it will be a mere flea-bite—three thousand pounds will be the outside — so you must be quite sure that my disinclination does not arise from that cause; and, in fact, having a good deal of East-India Stock, and West-Indian property, — all that sort of thing, — I ought to be in the House to look after my

varied interests, independently of the stake I have in the country itself,—but—I cannot endure it: so, you see, my dear Batley, the offer of secession in your favour is, in point of fact, no compliment."

"Why," said Jack, his face considerably elongated, and his countenance expressing a mixture of surprise and disappointment—"I—I—that is—I—think—that no difficulty can arise upon that point." (Hereupon his sanguine imagination darted rapidly towards his brother's teeming coffers.) "I think that I can manage that"——

"Manage!" said Magnus interrupting him,—"of course. 'Gad, the idea of not managing three thousand pounds, I suppose, never entered the head of mortal man. I merely mentioned the sum, because, upon my life! the thing's dog-cheap. In fact, these matters have become much more reasonable and more certain since we carried the Reform Bill."

"True," said Jack,—"anything better calculated for the advancement of bribery I never recollect, although I did vote for it."

"Excepting always the ballot," said Magnus. "Now, of course, with the number of tenants I have in different parts of the kingdom, it would be difficult and dangerous openly to tamper with them; but if the ballot could be really established, and for which, if you accept my offer, of course, you will do me the kindness to vote, the system is infinitely easier, — clearer, — plainer, and utterly beyond the reach of detection. *Par exemple*, if I say to any one of the three or four hundred of the people I have in Wiltshire, for instance, 'I will give you ten pounds for your vote, or I will abate ten pounds of your rent' — the case is flagrant; Thessiger, or Wrangham, or any of the leading Conservative parliamentary lawyers, (and, *entre nous*, Jack, the legal talent is all Tory,) — these fellows would knock us over; but with the ballot, where nobody knows anybody, and a bet does not consequently invalidate a vote, I say to Hawkins, or Jenkins, or Watson, or Jackson, or Taylor, or Tomkins, as the case may be, 'Are you going to ballot?'—'Yes,' says Tay-

lor, or Jenkins, or Watson, or Tomkins, 'I am.'—'Well,' don't you see?—with the vast spread of influence I have, I say—'I tell you what, Watson,' or Tomkins, or as the case may be, 'I'll bet you ten pounds the Tory candidate comes in.'—'Done!' says Watson, or Taylor, or Tomkins—and away he goes, and does his *possible* to keep the Tory out."

"A good notion," said Jack, "and I believe generally understood by our party; however, with respect to our immediate negociation, will you give me till to-morrow to think it over?"

"To be sure," interrupted Magnus, "the thing is an affair of not the slightest importance to *me*. I make you the offer, because, knowing your principles, I do not in the slightest degree compromise my own, and the fact is, that having a good deal of interest in other places, our dear friend Spoony—you know whom I mean—has been good enough to offer me a baronetcy, if,—don't you see?—not that I wish for it, or indeed would accept it,—it is now too common a reward,—so, *entre nous*, take your time and let me know at your leisure,

whether my proposition is agreeable and likely to suit your purpose."

Batley bowed an acquiescence, and cast "a longing lingering look 'behind," "with his mind's-eye," on his brother and his fortune, but knowing how very thick the coat of that excellent pine-apple-like relation was, he almost despaired of being able to avail himself of the not too liberal offer of his friend the Colonel.

"Well, my dear Batley," said Magnus, "I have now opened my budget, — I think you ought to be in Parliament, — as I say, you don't care for the smell and the heat and all that: — to a man accustomed to perfect ease and well ventilated rooms, it is quite another thing, — my greatest care, by Jove! in all my houses, is about the ventilation; and, I declare to you, I find a vast difficulty, — my rooms are so large — small rooms, by the way, are worse, — so hot in summer, and so cold in winter, — that, upon my life, half my time is passed with those architect people and builders, who, in point of fact, know nothing about the matter, in trying to keep myself at a proper tem-

perature. Don't put yourself out of the way about the offer; I dare say we shall either see or hear from Mortimer to-morrow, and then we can talk it over."

And so ended this dialogue, which, as I have already observed, completely mystified Jack Batley, who, although prepared for the mortification of being obliged to decline the seat, inasmuch as he shrewdly suspected that Jacob would have seen him safely lodged in one of the new-fangled parish Bastiles before he would either give or lend him the *quantum sufficit* for the seat, was, nevertheless, elevated to a great extent by the continued attentions and affections of such a man as Colonel Magnus, considering above all that he was the intimate personal friend of the much-desired Colonel Mortimer.

CHAPTER III.

THE ambition of Mr. John Batley having been fired by the offer of his friend the Colonel, he began to consider the more probable means of raising the sum required to conciliate the affections of his future free and independent constituents; and having revolved the matter in his mind in every shape and way, he at last came to the resolution of applying to Jacob, having worked himself into the hope, and even belief, that upon such an occasion his heart might be moved and his purse-strings opened. An invitation to dinner was the preliminary step, John having invariably found that his amiable relation was much more accessible after having made a hearty meal well washed down with generous wine, than at any other period of his existence.

These periodical fits of amiability were not peculiar to Jacob Batley; it is upon record that a certain curmudgeonly money-lender would never turn a favourable ear to the applications of his thoughtless customers, until he was considerably more than half-tipsy. One of his most constant *clients* used to declare, that, when he first knew him, two glasses of port-wine produced the desired effect; but that from the long habit of borrowing by the one, and of drinking by the other, before the witty spendthrift had concluded his connexion with him, two bottles at least were necessary to bring him to the lending state.

Jacob, who was a cunning trader, was perfectly conscious of the character of Jack's invitations, and looked for a financial application of some sort, as a sequel to the bidding, as naturally as he expected to hear thunder after seeing a flash of lightning; nevertheless, he uniformly went, and, kind as he might appear, comparatively, towards the close of the evening, it was not once in twenty times the object of his solicitous host and brother was realized;

and when it was, as has been already hinted, it was because the refusal would have brought discredit upon his own name.

Other matters, however, arose in the course of the day, which were of deep interest to Jack. More important was the return of Colonel Mortimer to London, than his own return for Mudbury. Return, however, he did; and the first house he went to after his arrival in town, was that of Mr. John Batley.

There is no doubt but that this event was considered by Jack, as indeed it proved eventually to be, the deciding move of Helen's life; and it was with unaffected warmth and pleasure he welcomed the accomplished gentleman to his house.

"What did you think had become of me?" said Mortimer with an archness of expression which implied that he perfectly well knew, from the cautious style of the letter he had received from him, his real opinion of his abrupt departure.

"Why," said Batley, "to tell you the truth, I was apprehensive that some fighting business

had called you so suddenly away, and I began to get nervous and fidgety."

"No," said Mortimer, "my fighting days are over; all I now look forward to is quiet, peace, and retirement. I am sick, dead sick of the vanities of the world; of its heartlessness, of its unprofitableness; and if I can find a really true, sincere, ingenuous creature, who will confide her destinies to me, and second my resolutions to become a good man, I am prepared to surrender my freedom into her hands."

The lyre of Calliope's son never sounded more melodiously in Pluto's ear than did these words on that of John Batley, Esq. Here was no equivocation as to the actual intentions and disposition of the gallant gay Lothario; and, although he affected still to be searching for such a partner in life as he depicted, still he would not have continued "harping upon my daughter," as Jack thought, unless she was in fact the object of his ambition and affection.

"I should think," said Mr. Batley, "that there is no young lady of common intelligence

who would not be too happy to strengthen you in such admirable resolutions."

"Faith! I don't know," said the Colonel. "If I were poor and needy and found favour in the eyes of a woman who would make sacrifices for me and share my pittance whatever it might be, I should feel a confidence in her affection; but the worst of it is, I have been so perfectly a man of 'the world,' have seen so much evil, have done so much wrong myself, that I cannot conquer my doubts, suspicions, and apprehensions, nor make myself believe that I *can* be loved for myself alone."

"This is a diffidence," said Batley, "which"——

"No, no," interrupted Mortimer, "it has nothing to do with diffidence; it is mistrust. And since we *are* upon the subject, let me be candid at once—is Helen at home?"

"Yes," said Batley.

"Now, Batley," said the Colonel, "we are both men of the world,—we understand each other;—you are no more blind than I am,—

you know what I feel towards your daughter, —yes, you do."

"I admit," said Batley, "that I think she is honoured by your favourable opinion."

"I have watched her," said Mortimer, "carefully and attentively. Her mind is pure and ingenuous—her manners frank and attractive; but—I will be candid with you—she was the sole cause of my abrupt departure from town; nor should I have returned for months had it not been for one line in your letter which announced the cessation of Ellesmere's visits here."

Batley, with a civil inclination of his head, listened to the Colonel, congratulating himself inwardly upon the eminent success of his diplomacy.

"That line brought me back," said the Colonel, "because it not only imparted a welcome fact, but proved to me that you knew I considered Ellesmere a rival, and therefore used the bit of intelligence as a hint that the coast was clear."

Batley remained listening, but not quite so well satisfied with the dexterity upon which

he piqued himself, and feeling even foolish at the detection of his real purpose.

"I will be frank and free with you, my dear friend," continued Mortimer; "and if Helen smiles, and you sanction it, she shall be the guardian angel of my future destinies. Think, Batley, on what small matters great things turn; her final rejection of Ellesmere one day longer delayed, would have separated us for ever."

"My dear Mortimer," said Batley, "whatever Helen decides upon, I sanction; she is my only child, — the dearest object of my existence: her choice is mine. The rejection of poor dear good-natured Ellesmere was her own act, unadvised by me; if it had its origin in any tender feeling towards another, I know nothing about it."

"Well then," said Mortimer, "I have your permission to make the attempt."

"Most assuredly," answered the happy father; "and more than that, my best wishes for your success."

It was not unamusing to see these two great

masters in the art of *finesse* playing each other off, each fancying that he was out-manœuvring the other. Mortimer's propositions of reform and retirement were as much sneered at by Batley, as Batley's affected ignorance of Mortimer's feelings, and his anxious desire that the match should take place, were pooh-pooh'd by Mortimer; nor were Mortimer's opinions and views of the subject rendered less striking by the knowledge which he had gained upon his return to the hotel, touching the ardent anxiety expressed by Batley, with regard to the place of his destination, when he paid not only the house, but the stables, his precautionary visit of inquiry.

But a different scene was about to be enacted in the boudoir, where Helen and her friend Lady Bembridge were seated, the third person of the party being a certain Captain Stopper, against whom Mortimer entertained the most unconquerable antipathy, and for whom Helen felt not much greater admiration. Helen, however, whose eyes had been red with tears, and whose heart had been aching ever since

Mortimer's departure, no sooner heard of his return (which event had been communicated by the Captain to both the ladies) than her sorrow converted itself into anger, and when Mortimer entered the boudoir, she received him with a marked and studied coldness, which threw her father into a fit of agony and perplexity.

In a *piquant* little book of rare merit, ycleped "*Maxims and Hints for an Angler*," —speaking of a trout, the author says, "Never mind what they of the old school say about 'playing him till he is tired;' much valuable time, and many a good fish, may be lost by this antiquated proceeding:—put him in your basket as soon as you can."

This advice, as regards fishing, coming from an able and experienced pen, as it does, seemed to anxious Jack perfectly applicable to the affairs of humanity; and, accordingly, Miss Helen's disposition for playing with *her* fish after having hooked him was particularly annoying to him.

Mortimer felt the alteration in her manner

quite as much as she intended he should, and at the moment when her bosom palpitated with delight at his return, she turned from him, after having permitted him to shake her hand, in order to ask Captain Stopper which of the new Murillo's he admired most, — the Captain being of that particular order of persons who are not able to distinguish the difference between a sign-board and a Sir Joshua.

" I thought you were out of town, Colonel Mortimer," said Helen, after having received a convenient " I don't know which I like best," from Captain Stopper, touching the pictures.

" I *have* been, as you might have guessed by my not having presented myself at *your* door," said Mortimer.

" Well, my dear Helen," said Lady Bembridge, who saw in a moment that a crisis was at hand, and felt, by the restrained tone of Helen's conversation, and the restlessness of her father's manner, that she was *de trop*, " I 'll run away. If a person have a great many commissions to execute for country cousins,

and wishes to get through her shopping, the best way is to begin early."

"Good morning!" said Helen, — "not that I see any reason for your hurry. Perhaps I shall see you again by-and-by."

"It is not impossible," said Lady Bembridge, still bustling to get away, and not only to get away herself but to disturb Captain Stopper, who appeared perfectly satisfied to remain where he was, having been highly pleased by the peculiar kindness of Helen's manner upon this special occasion. This, however, was too much for Batley's patience, who felt as if he were on the edge of a precipice, and resolved, even at the risk of apparent rudeness, to get rid of the gallant soldier.

"Have you five minutes to spare?" said Jack.

"Five hours," replied Stopper, "if I can be of use to *you*."

"Then, come and look at a young horse," said Jack,—"that I bought yesterday: I should like your opinion."

"Why," said Stopper, "giving an opinion

of a horse after a man has bought him, is like advising a friend in the choice of a wife after he is married."

"Come then," said Jack, "never mind,— I sha'n't be offended if you abuse him."

"Shall you be at Lady Sandown's to-night?" said Stopper to Helen.

"Are *you* going?" said Helen, with apparent interest.

"Yes," said Stopper.

"Are you quite sure you mean to go?" said Helen.

"Positive."

"Come!" said Jack.

"I see I must consent to be the judge," said Stopper, who was actually dragged from the paradise of Miss Helen's sanctum by her impatient parent. "Adieu! — Good morning, Mortimer!"

And so they went their way, Jack having no horse to show, but perfectly satisfied that having once got his plague out of the house, he could *finesse* some excuse for not visiting the stables.

"Well, Colonel Mortimer," said Helen, as soon as they were left alone, "you are an extremely polite person. I see you one evening at dinner—you are full of news, and anecdotes of everybody in the world — except yourself, as it seems, — for the next morning off you go, without one word of preparation, and leave all your friends to wonder and surmise. I believe you do this sort of thing to make yourself interesting."

"Why, Miss Batley," said Mortimer, "if I could have fancied, under all the circumstances, that my staying in London or going to the country could in any degree have excited *your* interest, I should certainly have made a point of announcing my departure; but it so happened, that when I sat next you at dinner I had not formed the intention of leaving town; and when I did form it, what I saw at Lady Saddington's did not at all tend to make me think that anything I might do could be of the slightest importance to *you*."

"What you saw!" said Helen — "what, were my actions watched?"

"They were, Helen," said Mortimer, "and were the cause of my sudden flight from the scene of my unhappiness."

"Colonel Mortimer!" said Helen ——

"Yes, Helen, — yes!" sighed Mortimer. "I went late; the crowd was, as you know, immense, and I was lost in the general confusion; but my eye rested where my heart was, and I saw that the envied place in the room was filled by Lord Ellesmere. I saw his earnestness of manner — his entire devotion to you. I saw you and Lady Bembridge leave the room before supper, and saw Ellesmere your companion in the departure. He did not return, and I felt the pang of knowing that his society was preferred by you to the general gaiety of the scene, — or even to the certainty of meeting me."

"But, Colonel Mortimer," said Helen, "how — why — or for what reason should you feel displeased with me for leaving a hot room when I was tired, or for accepting the arm of an intimate friend of my father's?"

"Helen," said Mortimer, "the time is past

for dissimulation. You know why I felt as I did: you know my thoughts, my hopes, my wishes, as well as I know them myself. You know, Helen, that I love you,—love you fondly, tenderly, sincerely! Could I endure the sight of you flying from the place where you were sure I should come to meet you, with a man whose attachment to you is notorious?"

"Oh, Colonel Mortimer!" said Helen, "do not charge me with dissimulation! Forgive me: think no more of that evening: it is past — over for ever!"

"I know, dear Helen!" said Mortimer, fondly pressing her unresisting hand: "had not that been certain, I should have returned to Italy, and have tried, by a recurrence to the mad pursuits of my earlier life, to dissipate the recollection of the happy hours I had passed with you; but, thanks to Providence! that mystery is solved, and you — yes, you, dearest Helen — will form the happiness, the pride of my future existence!"

Helen spoke not, but big tears rolled down her flushed cheek, and she trembled like a leaf.

"Calm yourself, beloved girl," said Mortimer: "speak not — I feel that I am blessed. Do not, for worlds, break the charm which is over me;—I am neither rejected nor despised!"

The look which Helen gave, confirmed his happiness; and before Batley returned from not looking at his horse, Colonel Mortimer and his future wife had calmed themselves into something like rationality; and when he arrived, his eyes were blessed with beholding the man whom of all others he desired for his son-in-law, sitting *tête-à-tête* with his darling Helen.

"Give me joy, Batley!" said Mortimer, "she consents!"

"I do give you joy," said Jack, "and I give her joy too. Come here, Helen:—here she is, my friend; take her, and assure yourself that you possess a treasure."

This appeared to "the world," as well as it did to Mr. Batley, a brilliant match: and most brilliant, because it blended true love with wealth and station. Helen herself felt at once relieved of a weight of pain and anxiety, arising out of the various circumstances of her

father's life. No longer was that cautious course of conduct which he was so perpetually inculcating required or called for. There was now no secret, no mystery; she loved Mortimer, and had owned it; she might now speak of him as she thought, and listen to his praises by others, without either deteriorating them, or denying his merits altogether: and yet it was a step of unusual importance to take.

Mortimer was her senior by nearly twenty years. His wild career had been run either before she was born, or while she was yet an infant: with the details and particulars of his moral offences she was unacquainted: she heard him generally set down as a *roué;* she had read in the peerage the record of his leading crime, but she attentively watched his conduct and listened to his conversation, without seeing or hearing anything confirmatory of what she considered the malicious hints thrown out about him. He was, however, himself sensitively alive to any allusion to his youthful follies, and most particularly so, if the slightest hint at them

was thrown out in *her* presence. This sensitiveness rendered the society of Mr. Jacob Batley (who was certain every moment to make some remark that way tending) excessively disagreeable to him; and unfortunately, as has just been stated, the said Jacob had been invited to dine with the family that very day,—a circumstance which would most assuredly not have taken place, had Jack known that Mortimer would have dined with them also; or had he been aware of the character in which he was to appear for the first time in the family circle, and of the consequent probability of getting *him* to furnish means for the attainment of the much desired seat in parliament, without troubling his brother on that very interesting topic. As it was, and having constantly before his eyes the hope of eventually possessing the said brother's worldly wealth, and the consequent fear of offending him, he thought the best thing he could do would be, to ask Colonel Magnus to join the party, and desire Helen to try and get Lady Bembridge also, on her return from

shopping, to stay and dine *sans façon*, hoping by this means to prevent as much as possible any dialogue between Jacob and Mortimer, and, by rendering the conversation more general, hindering the former from doing what he called "giving Master Mortimer a touch-up as to morality."

All these proposed arrangements were satisfactorily completed; Mortimer was separated at dinner from Jacob by Lady Bembridge and Colonel Magnus; and between the constant exercise of Jack's volubility on one hand, and the whispering conversation which was carried on by Helen and her avowed lover on the other, any collision between that "hero of many a tale" and his future connexion was prevented. But just as Helen and Lady Bembridge were on the point of leaving the dinner-room, the worthy citizen, leaning forward so as completely to command Mortimer's attention, said, *apropos* to nothing, and in the midst of a momentary lull —

"Pray, Colonel, how long have you been a widower?"

The question seemed to paralyze every one of the party; and no reply being made to it, he continued—

"I don't ask for mere curiosity;—in course it's nothing to me;—but my friend Haddock and I were talking over you and your affairs yesterday, and we differed as to your age; and he said—

"My dear Mr. Batley," exclaimed Lady Bembridge, rising from her seat, "the moment ages become the subject of conversation, ladies invariably run away."

This dexterous movement was instantly taken advantage of by Helen, who also made a step towards the door.

"Perhaps," said Mortimer, who turned deadly pale with anger and confusion, "perhaps, as mine appears to be the particular age about to be discussed, you will permit me to partake of your flight;" saying which, and having received a gracious look from Helen, the offended Mortimer left the room and its inhabitants in company with the retreating beauties.

"What! is he gone with the women?" said Jacob.

"'Gad!" said Magnus, "you did not expect him to stay?"

"My dear brother," said Jack, "how could you think of asking him such a question, and so abruptly,—and before Helen?"

"Question!" said Jacob: "Why, I asked him the question, because I wanted to know. As for abruptness, I don't know what you mean. I don't care who asks *me* a question,—nothing worries me."

"No, but," said Colonel Magnus, "there are so many peculiar circumstances and recollections connected with his former marriage, that his feelings—

"Feelings!" said Jacob contemptuously, "psha! what are feelings?—the woman's dead, and crying won't bring her back again: and if it could, I suppose, as he's dangling after Helen here, he wouldn't wish it could. I never lost a wife,—took good care I wouldn't—never had one—too much trouble to look after."

"But, my dear brother," said Jack, "you are not aware, for I have had no opportunity of telling you, that Colonel Mortimer has proposed to Helen, and been accepted."

"Whew," whistled Jacob, "then *she*'s settled; — that accounts for his starting and staring when I asked about his widowhood. I don't care, that's one good thing: if he is angry, he must get pleased again."

"Yes, only," said Jack hesitatingly, "there *are* points in a man's life, to which it is not always agreeable to refer; and" ——

"Whose fault's that?" said Jacob: "the man's own; he shouldn't have done anything to be ashamed of; — as for *me*, I never pity anybody; — *I* have never done anything I care for talking about — that's *my* comfort."

"Truly it may be so," said Magnus, "but Mortimer's case is a singular one: his youth at the time—he was in fact entrapped by an artful woman considerably his senior—in truth, a thousand circumstances of extenuation distinguish that affair from many others of a similar nature."

"I dare say they do," said Jacob, "but fact 's fact: he ran away with her, old as she was. And as for trapping,—I should like to see the woman that could trap *me:* —no, Colonel, no; what 's right 's right, what 's wrong 's wrong, and wrong never comes right: that 's my maxim, — no swerve — straight path. I never make allowances; nobody ever would make allowances for me, that 's all I know."

"I trust," said Jack, "that the results of his marriage with Helen may agreeably disappoint you."

"*Me!*" said Jacob,—"disappoint me!—not a bit of it. It 's all the same, as far as I am concerned: I sha'n't trouble my head one way or the other. I have my opinion, but that I shall keep to myself."

"Well," said Magnus, wishing to divert the current of conversation into some other and less ticklish channel, and addressing himself to Jack, "have you thought over what I said on the subject of the borough?"

This subject, as far as it went, was nearly as "ticklish" as the other. Jack had had no

opportunity of broaching the business to his brother, and sat upon thorns during the opening of the topic.

"No," said he, "no;—that is to say, I have thought it over, but I have had no opportunity—of—that is"——.

"Oh!" said Magnus, giving a significant nod, "I understand. My reason for asking is, that I find time presses. With regard to my own tenants and immediate dependents, of course, the thing is safe, generally speaking; but when one has three or four hundred tastes and fancies to consult, why, even if they *are* one's tenants, it is difficult to ensure unanimity. As for myself, as I candidly said, I wouldn't walk across my drawing-room to be returned:—my drawing-room!—'gad, no,—seven-and-thirty feet is a positive journey:—but I mean, that I wouldn't stretch out my hand to secure their 'sweet voices.'"

"What!" said Jacob, "are you talking of elections?—umph! A man of talent, and what I call up to the mark, might do a good

deal for himself and others in the House of Commons just now. I know of a point to be gained merely by being noticed; a blot — a regular blot to be hit, by which any calf's-head, served up with brains and tongue, would get both profit and popularity."

"Then," said Jack, "my dear brother, the opportunity offers: three thousand pounds will do the job, and the Colonel will secure the return."

"Positively," said Magnus, — "as safe as if the first letter were franked."

"Indeed," said Jack, "I was going to speak to you about it, as the Colonel knows."

"To *me!*" said Jacob; — "why, to *me?*"

"Why," said Jack, "knowing the kindness you have always shown me, and the confidence I have in your brotherly feeling, I thought, perhaps, you might be induced to afford me the opportunity of again sitting, and that"——

"Psha, Jack!" said Jacob; — "what a notion! What in the world should you be in Parliament for? — you are nothing of a debater, and you have nothing to back you. You

have got your pension, and what you would say would go but for little: you might talk against time,—do the duty of a division bell: —stuff!"

"Well," said Jack, "I certainly do not mean to press either my talents or claims upon your attention, but it would be, I admit, a great object with me to avail myself of my friend's offer."

"All I can say," said the Colonel, "is, that it is as safe, secure, and snug as Sarum senior used to be"——

"Umph!" said Jacob.

"Think of that," said Jack, elated by the considering mood into which he saw Jacob had fallen.

"It might, to be sure," said Jacob, "be a good thing, looking at it in one way."

"All I can say," said Jack, "is, that if you are disposed to assist me upon this occasion, it shall be the last time I ever will mention the word money to you; and I am sure you, my dear Magnus, will forgive me for talking of private matters in this manner before you, at

the same time that you may serve as a witness to my declaration."

"Three thousand pounds!" said Jacob;—"two years of the session over."

"Yes," said Magnus; "but, understand me,—I am prepared to guarantee"——

"Stop, Colonel, stop!" said Jacob; "this bargaining may get us into scrapes. I take care of Number One. Jack is my brother; but if I talk upon this matter, and if I may be inclined to go further into it, we must be alone: nothing like caution. Nobody would pity me if I was clapped up in Newgate under the Speaker's warrant—hah!—well, thank God! nobody will ever try to make *me* wear such a wig as he does—no. Three thousand pounds isn't much for such a point:—but is it all certain?"

"All plain-sailing," said Magnus. "You know, amongst the people with whom I live, of course, a man is obliged to be cautious, as you say, and sure of his card. I might, perhaps, throw my influence into another scale, but I prefer a sort of independence. Con-

nected as I am with so many interests, and with such a variety of duties to perform, I wish to maintain a perfect personal neutrality; and therefore, certainly not wishing to make such an offer to anybody politically opposed to my party, I prefer delegating my vote to somebody who, taking the same views as myself, can afford from all the various engagements of society, time, — and, I may add, health and constitution, — sufficient for an adequate and conscientious exercise of his duties."

"Three thousand pounds," again repeated Jacob.

"It is not so very large a sum!" said Jack; "and under the guarantee, as to the period of sitting"——

"No," said Jacob, "no."

"I see," said his delighted brother, — "I see by the twinkle of your eye that you like the notion. Need I say, again and again, how grateful I shall be."

"Grateful!" said Jacob, "what d'ye mean by grateful? — you will be grateful when you

get the money — for a week perhaps; and then, once in the seat—psha!—there 's no such thing as gratitude in the world. Nobody ever was grateful to *me*;—I suppose I never did anything to make anybody grateful. I'm sure I never was grateful to anybody; I don't want to be grateful. I work my way; what I get, I earn: I don't know what gratitude means."

"But," said the Colonel, "in this case, a fraternal feeling"——

"Fraternal fiddlestick!" said Jacob. "What difference does it make to me whether Jack is *your* brother or *mine*?—we are all brothers. Why, if I had indulged in fraternal feeling towards him, I should have been in jail long before now; and he knows that his anxiety about this very affair arises out of the question between a seat in the Commons or a room in the King's Bench."

"My dear Jacob!" said Jack.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the Colonel.

"Laugh, my lads!" said the merchant:—"many a true word is spoken in jest. No,—

if the seat is certain for three thousand pounds, I think, with a guarantee such as you speak of, the thing isn't dear."

"Why," said Magnus, "you speak of it as a regular bargain — a kind of purchase and sale; now, that is by no means the case. My people are all perfectly independent, only there are certain contingencies which" ——

"Well," interrupted Jacob, "I am ready to listen to all the contingencies and conditions, but not with a third person present: now that's flat. I trust nobody, and I will not get myself into a scrape."

"My dear Jacob," said Jack, "you are kindest of the kind; your prudence is perfectly praiseworthy. The invalidation of the whole thing, and personal difficulty to yourself, might result from the possibility of my being called upon hereafter as evidence to the transaction."

"That's what I say, Jack," said Jacob, finishing his bumper of port, and knocking the foot of the glass upon the table.

"Well, then," said Jack, giving the Colonel a signal with one of his eyes that matters

were evidently going on well, "I will leave you two to talk the affair over. I tell you *my* feeling on the business — I know *that* of the Colonel; and whatever sacrifice you may be kind enough to make, in spite of your views of gratitude, I"——

"There," interrupted Jacob, "no speeches. I never believe a word a man says when he tries to flatter; it's all humbug! — no man means what he says. You go and look after the arrangements up-stairs; Colonel Magnus and I will discuss the other concern."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear brother!" said Jack. "Here, Magnus," (delivering the bell-rope into his custody,) — "ring for wine when you want it, and make yourselves comfortable."

This delegation to the Colonel was upon the principle already noticed, of mollifying the merchant by a progressive exhibition, as the doctors call it, of red port; and Jack, satisfied that between the ebriety of the dandy, and the inebriety of his respectable relative, he should in less than an hour be the member

elect for Mudbury, proceeded up-stairs to join his darling daughter and her distinguished intended.

"Well," said Jacob, as soon as his brother was fairly out of the room, drawing his chair close to the Colonel, "now, we are alone—'gad, I think, as I have said, that a good deal is to be done in the next session by a practical man who knows his ground. As to our Colonies and the trade, and the Slave Emancipation, and that — I deal rather largely in that line, and know a thing or two."

"Ay," said the Colonel, "you mean the Apprenticing question?"

"Yes," said Jacob—"that, you know, is, in my mind, all stuff — nonsense! As I say, a black is a black; and, as Lord Brougham writes, till you can make the black man white, why, you can't give him a white man's feelings — that 's my view. Well, they want to emancipate these blacks — talk of humanity — what does that mean? — why, don't you see, — call the slave 'slave,' or call him ''prentice,' he'll still be black; and, as Brougham says, (I always

stick to him,) 'if he isn't whipped he won't work.' Well, now, they want to set these fellows free—good:—we say no; but if they will, why, we ask twenty millions of money—a goodish lump out of a poor country—not to change the nature of the cretur—not to make him white—not to turn his wool into hair—not to stop flogging him,—but to call him a ''prentice', and not to flog him unless his flogging is permitted by a sort of justice, who is to be paid for seeing how the flogging is done. Now, my idea is, that although this thing mayn't be carried for three, or four, or five years, still, a man with a notion of what's what, as I say—might make a hit in the House, and"——

"—Benefit the cause of philanthropy," said the Colonel.

"Philanthropy!" said Jacob, "fiddlestick philanthropy; not a bit of it;—do good to himself."

"Very probably," said the Colonel; "but, my dear sir, do you think that Mr. Batley has considered the subject sufficiently—quite out

of his line — to secure that advantage to himself or the cause?"

"Mr. Batley," said Jacob, filling his glass, "is up to every bit of it:—has all the Aldermanbury secrets at his command, and can show up the whole system, ay, to the very bottom."

"I had no idea that he" ——

"He!" said Jacob, looking intently at the Colonel, "who d'ye mean by *he?* I never talk of he's or she's,—I am speaking of myself."

"Oh!" said Magnus, "but I understood that our worthy host was to be the person to represent Mudbury under your patronage."

"Patronage!" said Jacob, "I never patronize anybody, nor anything — why should I? Who ever patronized me? Nonsense! You tell us of an opening at the House of Commons: of what use would Jack be?—none. All he says is gabble gabble gabble — stuff! — very fine in diplomacy — bows, and smiles, and all that,—but no weight in Parliament. All his cherry-clappery rattle with a pension in his pouch, will go no way there, com-

pared with what I may think fit to say upon subjects with which I am perfectly conversant, having a hundred and fifty thousand pounds in my pocket into the bargain."

"You, sir!" said the Colonel.

"I, sir!" said Jacob, "I speak for myself—whom else should I speak for? You tell me, as I have just said, that there is a seat in the House of Commons which you can command: well, I should like to sit in the House of Commons,—especially for a borough which returns only one member—have it all to myself—no partnership, no colleague, no bother, I, all alone. Well, you offer it to Jack,—of what use can it be to *him*? and if it is of use, what do I care? he never would put himself out of his way for *me*. We are alone — I know the world: — he wants me to give him three thousand pounds to put him again into parliament; I want to be in parliament myself: now, if that can be done, I'll make the three thousand, four; and that — pass the wine, Colonel — that will cover all contingencies."

Colonel Magnus stared with astonishment at

his companion. He was prepared to admit all his failings and all his selfishness, still, the present exhibition far exceeded his most sanguine anticipations. But this selfishness, hateful as it appeared even to Magnus, came qualified through that "golden mean," which gives, like the less valuable tint of jealousy, a colour to everything it falls upon:—the words "make the three thousand four, to cover all contingencies," rang in the ears of the Colonel so loudly, as to drive out everything that had preceded them; and all he said at the moment was —

"Then you would like to sit yourself?"

"To be sure," said Jacob, "who else? Why there are half a dozen whipper-snappering shopkeepers in parliament — paupers, — beggars, — who flourish about, and frank, and look fine, and do jobs. Why shouldn't I, who care for no man,—with a business better than the Bank itself,—why shouldn't I sit there too? If you choose, therefore, I'm your man, and four thousand the sum;—only, no bother—no contest—no rotten eggs and poll-cats—understand that. Reform has done wonders—makes the

thing easy when it *is* snug. I stand no nonsense: if I thought my little-finger nail was to be jammed against a door-post, I wouldn't stir."

"Rely upon it," said Magnus, "there will be no opposition: I only wish Mudbury sent two members instead of one, so certain is my interest."

"If it did," said Jacob, "as I said before, I wouldn't have it. I hate community of interests: — never had a partner — never had a wife — and hang me if I believe I ever had a friend."

"Then," said Magnus, who with equal magnanimity threw over his dear friend Jack in consideration of the additional thousand pounds, "I am to consider what you propose final as to this."

"Done and done," said Jacob, "that I believe is what you say at Newmarket; it is what we say when we bet hats in the city; and whenever and wherever to-morrow you like to settle definitively, I'm your man, and the stumpy down, upon the prescribed conditions."

"I will call on you at your counting-house," said the Colonel.

"Do," said Jacob, "that's business-like;—but how are you to find out Lillypot Lane?"

"Leave me alone," said the Colonel; "I know London pretty well:—so, now, shall we go to the ladies?"

"*You* may, Colonel," said Jacob, "but not I; I think I am rather in disgrace with your friend Mortimer. I suppose the wound will heal—no matter whether it does or not:—however, I shan't try to-night. Give me another glass of port, and I will toddle homewards, and if I am not too late, perhaps get one glass of hot punch and a cigar at 'The Horn.'"

"The what?" said Magnus.

"'The Horn' in Doctors' Commons," said Jacob.

"A most ominous sign for that particular neighbourhood," said Magnus.

"And a capital place for a chop and a bottle of black-strap," said Jacob. "You fine gentlemen don't know half the good places in this world."

"Well," said Magnus, "if you are really going, I think I shall retire also. I have no carriage here, and, if you have no objection, I will walk with you: I am going to Crocky's for my whist, — sober, sedate, and calculating."

"Ah!" said Jacob, "as it's dark, you don't mind taking my arm—eh! Never mind, Colonel, the member for Mudbury may be better worthy notice; — not that I mind; — let every tub stand on its own bottom; and, you mark *me*, if I sit in *that* House till I grow to the benches, I'll never pair off: no community for me, even if the interests are different. Come along."

And thus did these two worthy gentlemen quit the house of Mr. John Batley: the affectionate solicitude of his brother (for himself) being almost equalled by the Colonel's philosophical abandonment, for the sake of one additional thousand pounds, of his dear friend and Amphitryon.

Ainsi va le monde, as Jacob would have said if he had spoken French.

CHAPTER IV.

It was perhaps fortunate for the tranquillity of the Batley family, and even as regarded the final issue of Mortimer's connexion with it, that Uncle Jacob, wisely considering discretion the better part of valour, had effected his retreat from Grosvenor Street without exhibiting his comely person in the drawing-room. Certain it was, that the Colonel was bitterly offended by the question he had put at the dinner-table; indeed, he had taken an opportunity, soon after Mr. John Batley joined the ladies, of drawing him aside and complaining of his brother's abruptness and want of feeling.

"The circumstances," said Mortimer, "connected with that marriage, and the death of my poor Amelia, are of a nature not to be alluded to without wringing my heart to its very

core. Heaven knows that, if repentance and self-reproach can atone for vice and folly, my sufferings since her defection and subsequent death must have gone far to wash out the stain that fell upon my earlier life. A reference to it made by another, drives me almost mad; and when made in a tone such as that adopted by your brother, the feeling is still stronger:—do, pray, put him on his guard, and explain to him that the occurrences of my youthful days are interdicted subjects in my presence."

"It is wonderful," said Batley, "how totally impracticable he is. He has no intention to offend, but he has no feeling by which he can appreciate the feelings of other people, and I fear he is now too old to mend."

"Only save me from the recurrence of such a thing," said Mortimer; "and above all, beg him not to notice what occurred to-night in the way of explanation or apology, if he should express any wish that way; let it be forgotten —buried for ever."

"I'll manage him, rely upon it," said Batley.

"Batley," said the Colonel, after having

looked at him earnestly for nearly half a minute, "do you think—do you believe—do you know—whether Helen is acquainted with any of the circumstances of that affair?"

Batley knew that she was to a certain extent aware of it, as indeed it seemed impossible she should not be, inasmuch as her curiosity (interest is perhaps a better word) naturally had led her to enquire whom Mortimer's former wife was; and moreover, as has been already insinuated, she, like many other young ladies in the world, was not unfrequently in the habit of consulting that important book of fate "The Peerage," and there, as we have already heard, she *had* seen recorded and registered the divorce of Lady Hillingdon, and her subsequent marriage to Mortimer: but Batley, who wished to prove Helen infinitely more innocent and ignorant touching that affair than Helen really was, expressed considerable doubt whether she knew anything at all about it.

A smile which curled upon Mortimer's lip sufficiently expressed his incredulity upon that point, as he said with impressive earnest-

ness, "She ought to know the history — she ought not to marry such a man as I *have* been without a perfect knowledge of his early faults and follies."

This puzzled Batley: it seemed as if Mortimer himself felt that, a girl of right feeling, delicacy of mind, and purity of heart, might feel a repugnance to unite herself with such a man. If this should be started, and if Helen should be frightened into refusing to complete her engagement to her now accepted lover upon that ground, everything would be lost, the match broken off, and Helen, in all probability, doomed to a continued state of single unblessedness.

Batley, as was not unfrequently the case, was beaten by his own ingenuity; and all that Mortimer could extract from him was, a sort of equivocal kind of stammering of, "Why, I,—really, I,—upon my word, I," in which he dealt for about half a minute—time quite sufficient to assure the Colonel that Helen did know the whole history, and did not see in it any ground for objection.

"Come," said Mortimer, "Helen *does* know the story — I hope she does — my heart will then be at rest: tell her it myself I cannot; but if she is already informed of it, there ends one of my great difficulties,—for, Batley, bad as I may have been, I could not now find it in my heart to deceive or mislead such a girl as your daughter, even upon the most trifling point."

"Why then," said the sensitive parent, "I will honestly tell you that I believe she does know the leading facts of the case; indeed, you may rely upon it, the very cause and origin of this conversation, my tough-skinned brother, would take care she should not die uninformed of them."

"Heaven defend me from *him!*" said Mortimer, "though he *is* your brother. It seems quite extraordinary that Nature can form men of such opposite and varied characters and temperaments as we see every day in the world. Mr. Jacob Batley would discuss and descant for an hour, without flinching, upon a subject the slightest allusion to which would throw me into agonies."

"A rough diamond," said John.

"Which, as far as I am concerned," said Mortimer, "requires cutting."

"I don't mean," said Batley, "to press him upon you, I assure you; but there is a great deal of good in him."

"Of that I have no doubt," said the Colonel; "and it seems but reasonable there should be, for, as far as my experience goes, very little comes out of him. No: I know you are too much a man of the world to be offended about it; but I must beg,—at least when Helen is present,—that he may not be of our parties. You have no idea of the misery in which I live during his presence: I feel like a fellow on the tight-rope expecting every minute a rude push from the clown which is to topple him over."

"I assure you," said Batley, who would willingly have sacrificed fifty vulgar brothers, if he had had them, on the shrine of the elegant Colonel whom he worshipped, "it shall not occur again. Indeed, to be candid with you,"—and when Batley *was* candid, his in-

genuousness was quite overwhelming,—"he would not have dined here to-day if I had anticipated the pleasure of your company, nor if I had not had an object to gain—a point to carry — very near my heart."

"And what may that be?" said Mortimer.

Now came the moment. Mortimer had made the expulsion of Jacob a sort of condition in the treaty of alliance between them: Jacob's assistance to further the parliamentary scheme was therefore not to be gained by any more of that social hospitable conduct which his brother, as we have already seen, was in the habit of observing towards him whenever he happened to require his aid pecuniarily; and, consequently, Mr. Batley jun. thought he might most reasonably and seasonably sound his intended son-in-law as to *his* disposition with regard to the three thousand pounds required by his friend Magnus for the seat. If, thought Jack, he hates my brother so much as to exile him from my house, he must be aware that I cannot expect him to assist me in the enterprize against the worthy people of

Mudbury; and, as money is no object with *him*, he will not hesitate to secure himself against the intrusion of a person whom he so much dislikes by an outlay of this sort, which, while it guarantees peace of mind to himself, gives him the additional gratification of serving and pleasing *me*.

"Why," said Batley, having made up his mind and screwed his 'courage to the sticking-place,' "the fact is, I am anxious to be in Parliament again; — and —I—perhaps you are aware that our friend Magnus has the power of meeting my wishes."

"I know," said Mortimer, "that Magnus, who is, as the phrase goes, 'hard-up,' is hawking about a Wiltshire borough, which he believes he can command, but I do *not*: besides, you don't mean to pay for coming in, I presume?"

"Why," said Batley, "I did think of it. Since the Reform Bill has passed, I see no other chance except standing a contest in one of the large boroughs, which I am not up to; as for counties, they are out of the question for any of *us*: and so, you see, I naturally directed

my views towards my brother Jacob. Now, as I know by experience that nothing but the soothing system is likely to succeed with him, I had begun a series of invitations in order to win him over; and, in fact, the one which he accepted to-day has had some effect, for I got him to talk upon the subject with the Colonel this evening, and left them discussing it when I came up-stairs."

"I think," said Mortimer, "you could either lay out your money more wisely, or, perhaps more wisely still, not lay it out at all. All I can say is, if a seat in Parliament were an object with me, and I was sure of obtaining it by the process you propose to adopt, I should give it up in despair. — Come, let us join the ladies."

This *cut-short* did not quite please Batley, who found that, however generous, liberal, or noble a man's sentiments may be, the moment the word money is mentioned, he sinks to the common level of humanity. Jack congratulated himself that he had not gone the entire length of asking Mortimer's assistance,

which, it was quite clear, he would not have afforded him; and with the elasticity of mind for which he was pre-eminent, he fell back upon Jacob as his only hope.

Mortimer left his future father-in-law somewhat abruptly it must be confessed, and returned to the front drawing-room, where Helen and Lady Bembridge were still *tête-à-tête;* but his manner was subdued, the smile which had previously played so agreeably on his mouth had vanished, and a dense cloud of care seemed to hang on his brow. He had decided,—his course was chosen,—and the beaming, blushing Helen was his own:—but, could he see her without a recollection of the past?—could he forget those scenes and passages of his life of the details of which he devoutly hoped she was ignorant? No:—let the man of the world be ever so hardened; let him fancy himself callous to the appeals of feeling or conscience, his vaunted courage fails him when his looks rest upon confiding innocence like Helen's. He was wretched in the midst of his happiness, and gazed upon his treasure, as her father justly called her, with

a feeling of doubt and distrust. "When she knows me, she will despise me," said to himself this wealthy, worldly man: his love for her, devoted as it was, was devoid of that freshness and singleness of heart which is so essential to earthly happiness. The besetting evil of his life was mistrust, not only in himself but others. He had himself triumphed over the confidence of a fond husband—he had been wooed and won by a fair and lovely creature, strange to say, not unlike Helen personally; and as he sat, abstracted and away from her, gazing on her bright eyes, her snow-white forehead, and her jetty curls,—curls blacker than the raven's plumage,—instead of contemplating the bright vision with satisfaction and delight, a deep-fetched sigh from his inmost heart was mingled with the thought that such had once been his loved,—his lost Amelia!

The associations which lead men to certain actions of their lives are unaccountable, their effects extraordinary, and sometimes absurd—pre-eminently absurd. In this case most true and certain is it, that the sym-

pathy which first attracted Mortimer to Helen *was* her resemblance to the unhappy Lady Hillingdon, his former wife. And yet, if the likeness could have led to any conclusion, it might have reminded him of her misconduct and miserable fate. And so in point of fact it did. Whilst he sat that very evening, contemplating her beauty—unquestionable beauty too — he pictured to himself the perils of her future life; married to a man much older than herself, and consequently more exposed to the arts and attentions of flatterers, who, like the Mortimer of other days, would no doubt be found in her train, pursuing exactly the course which he had followed, even before she was born.

"No," said Mortimer to himself, "she must live great part of the year at Sadgrove; there, her influence will be truly beneficial to me; there, in a calm and quiet retreat from the giddy world, she will exert a mild and genial influence over our neighbourhood; benevolence and charity will be the leading attributes of her character; and there, she will eternally

bind my affections, draw me from this idle town and its associations, make me happy here, and," added he, with a sigh of mistrust, "hereafter."

All this, right and reasonable as it might be, was not what was to be expected from an ardent and devoted lover. Nor *was* Mortimer ardent, however devoted he might be; that was most certain. Helen saw that he was not entirely at ease, — not happy as she would have wished to see him; and of course, as perfectly unacquainted with what had recently passed between him and her father, as with that which was passing in his mind at the moment, she quitted Lady Bembridge, and, throwing down some absurd sort of work upon which she fancied she was employing herself, she crossed the room, and, seating herself beside him, said—

"Dear Francis, what *is* the matter?—you look ill, — you look melancholy, — nay, you look cross; rely upon it, frowns do not become you."

Mortimer smiled, and took her hand. It was the first time she had called him Francis;

it was the first time she had ventured to discuss the character of his countenance, or give an opinion as to what became it, or what did not. The smile was one of doubtful import,—the pressure of the hand was tremulous.

" I will smile, Helen, if you wish it," said Mortimer.

" Not if you are not in a smiling humour," said Helen ; " I hate anything that is not natural,—as my thoughts are, so are my looks,—my face is, I am sure, the index of my mind,—I couldn't smile if I were not pleased. And yet I have seen women in parties look as lively as I do now, while their hearts were breaking."

" Why really," said Lady Bembridge, " it must be confessed, if a woman have any domestic grief rankling in her bosom, it is a very difficult task to gild the countenance with a mirthful expression."

" And," said Mortimer, " what made you think the hearts of those laughing ladies were breaking, Helen ?"

" Oh !" said Helen, " because I knew their little private histories, and have seen all

through their conduct;—nay, I have heard a husband in a crowded room speak as rudely, and nearly as loudly to his wife, as he would have done with the same disposition if they had been alone,—and I have seen the patient bearty, pale with fear at the violence of her lord and master, her cheek pale as a lily, and her lips blanched with fear, force an expression into her countenance, not only placid, but gay when spoken to by another unconscious person at the same moment. I have wondered as I watched, and loved her for hiding from the world the harshness of the man, whose ill-humour, as a devoted wife, she would not betray."

"Well then," said Mortimer, half whisperingly, "if we ever *do* quarrel in public, you will, I hope, emulate the example you so much extol."

"Quarrel!" said Helen, gazing on his fine countenance, "what *should* we quarrel about?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Mortimer; "I am only providing against the most unpleasant contingencies."

"No," said Helen, "let us go into the country,—let us leave this noisy town,—I am getting heartily tired of it:—*I am*, Francis,"—this last asseveration was caused by a sort of incredulous shake of Francis's head,—"all I ask is peace and quiet, and the society of those I love."

"I think," said Mortimer, "you will like Sadgrove,—it is a nice place. It wants the addition of a few more rooms, which we will give it, Helen. The Severn runs its silvery stream at the foot of the knoll on which the house stands; and I assure you, though not very extensive, the park is as prettily thrown about, and as richly wooded, as the best landscape gardener in the world could desire."

"I am sure I shall like it," said Helen:—"*you* like it?"

"Yes," said Mortimer, "I used to delight in it."

"When were you there last, Francis?" said Helen.

"Last!" said Mortimer,—and his countenance resumed the gloomy expression which the conversation of the last few minutes had

in a great measure dispelled, — "last! — I haven't been there much lately, — I, — that is —not for four or five years."

"It is a delightful neighbourhood," said Helen.

"A remarkably fine country," said Mortimer.

"Aye!" said Helen, "but I mean a delightful neighbourhood for society. I have a cousin living not above twenty miles from Sadgrove, and he says nothing can be more sociable."

Mortimer made no answer. When *he* lived at Sadgrove with Amelia, Sadgrove was a desert. This fact never occurred to him, when he looked forward to the solitude of Sadgrove as a most delightful passage of his future life, in which, like another Adam, he might enjoy his paradise with one sole companion:—the expression "delightful neighbourhood" used by Helen, brought to his ardent and sensitive mind an entirely new picture of his former retirement. Neighbours, — neighbourhood, — what did it mean? When he lived there, the

gates of Sadgrove Park rusted on their hinges, and the grass grew on the sills of the lodges; it was then indeed a retirement, and he still looked to it as one; nor till this moment had he anticipated any difficulty in reconciling a young creature, who possessed a desire for the pleasures of the country and the enjoyments of rural life, to a seclusion which is the lot of those who, by the gratification of some unholy passion, purchase a perpetuity of solitude, even in the midst of the multitude.

Helen's abstract notion of a country life (having been on visits with her vivacious parent to various country-houses) was, the transference of London into the country. A greater ease, and more perfect sociability, rendered her happier when away from the trammels of town society; but, of the enjoyments to which Mortimer looked forward, — the quiet stroll by moonlight; the *tête-à-tête* in which the husband was to read while the wife was to draw; or the morning during which the husband was to shoot and the wife to do what she could to amuse herself; the visits to

cottages; the inquiries after sick old women; the superintendence of Infant Schools, and "all such," as the worthy Wadsford hath it, she had no idea. The windows of a drawing-room looking over the Vale of Llangollen or the rails of Grosvenor Square, were still the windows of a drawing-room; and a boudoir well muslined-up, whether it were blinded from the glare of Park Lane or sheltered from the bright sun beaming on the wide sea, was still a boudoir; and, therefore, Helen's idea of a charming country was, where she might do exactly as she did in London, only in a purer atmosphere for a certain part of the year: and it was for this reason that she was glad to get away from a routine of society of which towards the end of the season she grew tired, to that which, as she felt, she might in her new capacity choose for herself.

Old Flint, in "The Maid of Bath," when endeavouring to win the consent of Miss Linnett to their marriage, asks the young lady if she is fond of the country; to which she mere-

ly replies by a repetition of the question. "Aye," says Flint, "because why, I think it is the most prettiest place for your true lovers to live in — something so rural. For my part, I can't see what pleasure pretty misses can take in galloping to plays and to balls, and such expensive vagaries; there is ten times more pastime in fetching walks in the fields and plucking the daisies." Whereupon Miss Linnett observes, "that even in this happy state, where the most perfect union prevails, some solitary hours will intrude, and the time now and then hang heavy on our hands."

"What, in the country! my dear miss," says Flint, — "not a minute; you will find all pastime and jollity there: for what with minding the dairy, dunning the tenants, preserving and pickling, nursing the children, scolding the servants, mending and making, roasting boiling and baking, you won't have a minute to spare; you will be merry and happy as the days they are long."

Upon this point Miss Linnett ventures a doubt, but expresses a hope, that as Mr. Flint's

pleasures are chiefly domestic, his home is as convenient as can be:—"You have good gardens," says the young lady, "no doubt?"

"Gardens!" says the venerable lover,—"why, before the great parlour window there grows a couple of yews, as tall as a mast and as thick as a steeple; and the boughs cast so delightful a shade that you can't see your hand in any part of the room; and in them, there constantly roosts a curious couple of owls, which I won't suffer our folks to disturb, they make so rural a noise in the night. As for my mansion, you may stretch your legs without crossing the threshold:—why, we go up and down stairs in every room in the house. To be sure, it's a little out of repair at present; not that it rains in, where the casements are whole, at above five or six places at present."

"Your prospects are pleasing?" says Miss Linnett.

"From off the leads," replied Flint; "for why, I have boarded up most of the windows to save paying the tax; but, to *my* thinking,

that which will be our bedchamber, miss, is the most pleasantest place in the house."

"Oh!" replied Miss Linnett, colouring like crimson, "you are too polite!"

"No, miss," said Flint, "it isn't for *that*, —but, you must know, there is a large bow-window facing the East, which does finely for drying of herbs: it is hung round with the hatchments of all the folks that have died in the family:—and then the pigeon-house is right over our heads, and we shall be waked at daybreaking with their billing and cooing, that will make it as fine as can be."

To these allurements Flint adds a list of the neighbours who are to enliven them when they require a little stimulus. "The Widow Kilderkin who keeps the 'Adam and Eve' at the end of the town, quite an agreeable body, —indeed, the death of her husband has driven her to tipple a bit; Farmer Dobbins's daughters; and Dr. Surplice, the curate, and wife, a vast conversable woman if she wasn't altogether so deaf."

Now, although most assuredly no two ani-

mals of the same species could be so different in genus as Flint and the elegant Colonel Mortimer, the inducements which the graceful *roué* was holding out to Helen, as to Sadgrove, were, with all her professed love of rurality, not much more congenial with her taste than those which Foote's admirable miser suggested to the celebrated Maid of Bath.

Mortimer's thoughts had been driven into a new channel by the observations of Helen, and in a moment a new prospect opened to his view. This vaunted retirement of Sadgrove — what would it be?—in point of fact, no retirement at all. Sadgrove was no apt or fitting theatre whereupon to enact the drama of his reformed life: within a few miles of Worcester, one of the gayest and handsomest cities in the empire; in the midst of thickly-studded country houses, with Malvern at hand, and a thousand rural gaieties surrounding, his system of seclusion and reform was little likely to be carried into effect.

"What then?" thought he. "Helen has gone the round of London society for three or

four seasons; if she still retain her taste for the amusements incidental to a country life in our station, why should she not enjoy them? To *me* the very difference of our position at Sadgrove to that in which I was placed by circumstances during my last residence there, will so far alter the character of the place, that the recollections which I so much dread will perhaps not haunt me. Helen is right; we *will* be gay,—we will receive and entertain; and whenever we get tired of visitors and wish to fall back upon our own resources, we can."

These anticipations first inspired by Helen's artless observation cheered him, and his face resumed that expression the absence of which Helen had lamented to perceive.

It is not necessary, in the present stage of Mortimer's association with Helen, to repeat at length or in detail the various conversations in which they indulged with regard to their future plans. Mortimer soon ascertained the extent of her admiration of the country; and upon the principle which suggested itself on the first evening upon which she had expressed

her sentiments and opinions that way tending, he resolved to make Sadgrove, in spite of its lugubrious name, everything that was lively and cheerful.

The time "progressed," as our Trans-Atlantic friends have it. The marriage of Mortimer and Miss Batley was the talk of the world; and paragraphs anticipatory of the splendour of the *trousseau,* and all other matters connected with so distinguished a union, filled the fashionable newspapers. Batley himself seemed to "ride on a whirlwind," and if he did not "direct the storm," anybody, to have seen him, sparkling and chattering in the highest possible spirits would have imagined that he himself was on the eve of marrying an heiress with a fortune twice as large as that of his future son-in-law.

Meanwhile Jacob, excluded by command of Mortimer, and therefore decidedly affronted, pulled up haughtily, and declared that he never would set foot in Jack's house as long as he lived: and it unfortunately having occurred that his volatile brother was obliged to

give him the hint to abstain, the very morning after his *tête-à-tête* with Colonel Magnus, Jacob, lest his return for Mudbury should be of use to that gentleman, wrote to cry "off" as to his negotiations for the seat, merely because Jack, in pressing upon him his own anxiety to sit, happened to repeat Mortimer's statement with regard to the state of the Colonel's affairs. Hence, in order not to relieve the embarrassments of any man who was a friend of Mortimer's, arose the relinquishment of his personal object; and hence, of course, resulted his positive refusal to advance one single farthing to advance the views of poor Jack.

It must be evident that the younger Batley, powerfully acted upon by Mortimer's expressed desire, that the bear should not come to his steak in Grosvenor Street, had sealed his own fate, and that of Helen's, as far as regarded the worthy of Lilypot Lane, by making him understand how very desirable just for the present his absence was. It is true that Jack softened down the harshness of the suggestion, by throwing out hints as to the love of retire-

ment and quiet so much desired by two persons on the eve of marriage, and the embarrassment which they felt in the presence of strangers, the various matters they had to arrange and consult about, and concluded his qualifications of the "warn off," by assuring him that the exclusion was not personal to him, but that there would be no visitors admitted until the wedding took place.

"You are quite right, Sir," said Jacob;—"a brother is seldom considered a stranger,—but no matter,—the day will come,—mark my words,—when you, and the fine young lady whom you have taught to despise me, because you want her to marry a rake without principle or character, may be down on your marrowbones begging at my feet:—wait till that day comes, and then you will hear me say: 'When you were gay and great, as you thought, and in prosperity and pride, you drove me from your door—it 's my turn now:' and, mark you, *brother*, don't call me hard-hearted if I do; for if the thing happens, do it I will." And so went Jacob his way, his brother not

quite unmoved at the last appeal: — nay, Jack, although neither awed nor acted upon by Jacob's threat in case of a contingency which as he felt confident never could occur, felt a pang at what had happened, and an anxiety to follow and appease him: "but it would be of no use," said Jack, "it might only irritate him the more, and it were best to let him take his course."

It might have been better not,—but *that* time will show.

Now it was that Jack's anxiety to secure Mudbury raged with double ardour;—Mortimer could not be applied to; the repulse he had already met with settled that question, and any recurrence to the subject would probably alarm the nice feelings of his proposed son-in-law. Was there no other channel through which he might obtain the means? This speculation engaged all his thoughts, and, as he felt, demanded all his energies. The vacancy would be declared in ten days, and that was but a limited period in which to make any arrangements: for, as Jacob had truly said,

"John Batley had been in the money market before," and the advantageous marriage of his daughter seemed to him not unlikely to add to his facilities in again applying to his friends, who had, for considerations equivalent thereunto, previously afforded him that aid which his nearest relation had denied.

About this period in our history, the happy day was fixed for the celebration of the nuptials: every preparation was making to render Sadgrove worthy the presence of its future mistress; the settlements were drawn; and the fair Helen, with eight hundred pounds per annum as pin-money, and a jointure of two thousand five hundred a year, was accordingly congratulated by her elderly female friends, and proportionably envied by her young ones. Mortimer's kindness and attention were of the tenderest and most assiduous character: the bright prospect of his future happiness had driven away the gloomy reminiscences which, until his heart had been again engaged, and his thoughts devoted to a new and lovely object, had haunted and distracted his mind. He

was an altered man; the thought that he was loved, really and sincerely loved, raised him in his own estimation, and if happiness be attained in this lower world, Mortimer may be said to have been, at the present juncture, happy.

The state of nervousness in which Batley existed during this trying period, cannot be described; his life was, as has already been stated, one continued flurry: but little was either he, or Colonel Magnus, prepared for the course which brother Jacob thought proper to pursue. Suffice it to say, that within about six days of the declaration of the vacancy at Mudbury, made by the appointment of the sitting member to an office with which the seat was untenable, Colonel Magnus informed Jack, that his blunt and impracticable brother had come down to the borough, *and was canvassing for himself.* The name of the rich Batley worked wonders, and it became pretty evident to Magnus, by the letters which he received from his agent, that Jacob's straightforward principle of buying the votes for himself, instead of trusting to the gallant officer's

agency, was likely in the most triumphant manner to take Mudbury out of his delicate hands.

The instant diplomatic John had, in all the confidence of fraternal affection, permitted Jacob to understand, that Magnus was in the first instance to buy, while in the second he was to sell, Jacob said to himself, — if that be the position of affairs, it is quite clear, tenants of the Colonel's or not, in his circumstances, I may as well outbid him in the market at first hand, as give him a premium for his agency. The Colonel wrote strong letters of remonstrance to his dear friends at Mudbury, and declared his intention of bringing down a gentleman of weight, consequence, and notoriety, to contest the borough against any other candidate who might be proposed. But the independent reformers knew their man: they knew that the Colonel's influence was what they called "moony," produced only by reflected light; that in point of fact, whatever his nominal extent of property in the neighbourhood might be, he had no solid claims upon

them, and therefore, with long leases in their possession, they prudently resolved, in order to support the purity of election, to rebel against what might be supposed an undue influence, and pocket the cash of Jacob Batley, of whom they had previously known nothing, and had never before heard, in order to evince to the country at large that independence of their immediate superior, which is at once a characteristic of the party to which they adhered, and so brilliantly illustrative of that glorious march of intellect in which the British Empire so singularly rejoices.

CHAPTER V.

It becomes necessary for the better understanding of our history, that the reader should now be introduced to a personage of whom as yet no mention has been made, but whose character and conduct may perhaps deserve more of his commendation, than the attributes of certain others of the family party would be likely to command.

Mrs. Farnham was the sister of Colonel Mortimer; she had married young, and for love, but neither imprudently nor without the consent and approbation of her parents. Her husband was sufficiently wealthy to enjoy and afford her all the rational comforts of the world, without any of the dazzle and glare of society by which so many young and lively women are fascinated, but which had no charms

for Emily Mortimer. Her career as a wife was as happy as she could wish it to be; but, in less than six years after her union with Mr. Farnham, she became a widow, and had never since the death of her husband returned to England. In the society of an early attached female friend, who like herself had lost an affectionate husband, she seemed resolved to pass the remainder of her days on the Continent; and although childless, the two daughters of her companion had so much engaged her affections, that, in point of fact, they appeared to constitute one family of love.

When Mortimer's affair with Lady Hillingdon became matter of public notoriety, his sister was absent from England; and, after the death of her husband, and that of the unfortunate partner of her brother's criminality, Mortimer paid his sister a visit. Then it was he earnestly entreated her to come to England with her friend and her children, and make Sadgrove a home not only for herself and them but for him: but Emily strenuously refused. She, although nearly and dearly connected with

him, could not bring herself to make those allowances for his conduct, which his less sincere but more worldly friends were quite ready to concede; and his stay at Florence, where she was then residing, was not rendered sufficiently agreeable to him, to induce him much to protract it. He quitted her only to seek, in scenes less beneficial to his mind and morals, an oblivion which he sought in vain; and, when he returned to England worn out with hoping for ease and tranquillity, his eyes fell upon the beautiful Helen, and, as we have already seen, he devoted himself to the attainment of happiness by an union with youth and innocence.

It was now his great object to induce his sister to come to England to grace and sanction this second marriage with her presence and countenance; and he accordingly renewed his entreaties that she would accede to his wish, and quit Naples, (whither she had removed,) and greet his lovely Helen as a sister.

"My dear Francis," wrote Mrs. Farnham, in answer to his repeated letters, "forgive me for still adhering to my determination to re-

main here until my excellent friend thinks it necessary to take her daughters finally to England. I find the climate agree with me—I delight in the purity and brightness of an Italian sky—you know how warmly I enter into all matters of art and virtù, and how ample the resources here are for the gratification of a taste which I could nowhere else so well afford to cultivate.

"If I could imagine that my being present at your marriage would either increase the chance of your future happiness, or give pleasure to your youthful bride, I would gladly make any sacrifice to do as you wish; but, really and truly, I have grown so unworldly, and, above all, know so little of English manners of the present day, that I think my society would rather *gêne* you and Mrs. Mortimer, (when she *is* Mrs. Mortimer,) than be agreeable: and as to my remaining with you permanently, I am convinced, by experience acquired from looking at the domestic circles of others, that there must be no divided power in a family, and that the intervention of a mother, or a sister, or an aunt, in the dominion which

ought alone to belong to the wife as mistress of her house, is invariably destructive of domestic happiness. Your picture of the future is bright and delightful;—God send the reality may be equally so. It has been for years the prayer and wish of my heart to see you reclaimed from irregularities which have been induced, I know, rather by a readiness to give in to the indiscretions of others, than by any inherent disposition of your own. The opportunity seems, by your own account, now to present itself, and I do fervently hope you will avail yourself of it, and become all I ever wished you to be.

"Ten years' difference in our ages, Francis, permits me to write gravely, and upon one point I write most earnestly. If Miss Batley be the person you represent her, leave her none of your earlier failings to find out,—be candid, explicit, and honest with her in painting the indiscretions of your youth. So may you expect candour and openness from *her*. Trust a woman by halves, and you make her doubtful, suspicious, restless, and jealous; tell

her all, and she becomes your friend, your confidential friend, whose faith no temptation will break.

"If you should bend your steps hitherward, I shall, indeed, be delighted to greet you, and to prove to your wife how cordially I rejoice in calling her sister. Do not, therefore, imagine that my disinclination to do all you wish, arises from any cause but a dislike to returning to England at present. You are fond of Italy—why not come? You will move here as stars of the first magnitude; and I think we can make up a little agreeable society which will delight your Helen. I have no doubt we shall see you here before many months are over. Present my warmest congratulations and good wishes to her, and press my invitation with all your wonted eloquence."

More, much more, did Mrs. Farnham write to her brother, which he read with his usual misgiving and distrust. "No, no," said he to himself, "she has no objection to come to England—why should she have any? The objection she has to being present at my marriage

arises from her sensitive delicacy, and the recollection of how I was situated when I last knelt before that altar. Her evasion is transparent; her motives and feelings are evident to me through the thin veil of pretences with which she tries to cover them. She foresees unhappiness in my marriage — at least, she doubts when she speaks of my future comfort, and hopes that my prospects may not be illusory. I am not good enough to be honoured with her countenance — well! — I could have wished it otherwise — but no matter — so be it."

Mortimer, always alive to his own unworthiness, and conscious how obnoxious his character was to censure from those who knew his history, was seriously annoyed by Mrs. Farnham's letter; and such, with all his experience of the world and its ways, was his sensitiveness, that he was unable to rally for hours, sometimes for days, from the effect of any sudden shock to his feelings. He had made up his mind to having his sister present at his marriage; he had spoken of her coming to Helen

with something like certainty, and had delayed the ceremony expressly for the purpose. He fancied that her refusal, couched even as it was in the kindest terms, would lower him in the esteem of his future wife, and stamp him as a man to be avoided even by his nearest relation on earth.

The disappointment to his hopes upon this, in point of fact, unimportant subject, preyed upon him so much as to produce a serious illness, not unfrequently the result of those dreadful struggles which it required to stem the violence of his temper; and when, after the lapse of five or six days, he was restored to the society of his betrothed, there hung about him a gloom which even Helen herself thought somewhat inappropriate to the season and to the event which was so near at hand.

While this dull period was passing, Mr. Jacob Batley was labouring in his agreeable task, not only of frustrating his brother's hopes as to Mudbury, but in that of undermining the interest of the gallant Colonel himself. Sharp, shrewd, and active, he had no sooner

renounced all connexion with Colonel Magnus, whose name, like that of his friend, had been not unfrequently in the money market, than he proceeded to the London banking-house in correspondence with the Mudbury Bank; and, being on terms of intimacy with one of the partners, commenced a series of enquiries touching the real value of the Colonel's influence, and what sort of people he might expect to have to deal with. The result of which conversation was, a resolution to proceed direct to the scene of action, first sending down what is termed a good electioneering attorney, as his agent and councillor, to examine the ground; and, in order to make a favourable impression in advance as he called it, he paid a considerable sum into the London house on account of their provincial clients, without giving any reason to anybody for so doing: well convinced that the tacit lodgement of a thousand pounds more than he had proposed to "stump," as he called it, to the Colonel, would make a sensation in the place — where it was sure to be spoken of — not calculated to

damage his interests when he announced himself, as he intended to do in a day or two afterwards, as a free and independent candidate come amongst them to rescue them from tyranny, oppression, and slavery.

To further this design, the lawyer whom he had engaged was one whose activity and sharpness were proverbial in the particular line of business for which Jacob had retained him; and, as in love, horse-dealing, and electioneering, it is held that "all is fair," Mr. Brimmer Brassey, of Barnard's Inn, was considered one of the most desirable acquisitions for a well-disposed active candidate in a contest that could be made.

Mr. John Batley's efforts to procure the means of facilitating his introduction to the "free and independent" vassals of Colonel Magnus were by no means successful, and the day drew near when it was absolutely necessary for him to give a definitive answer to the *soi-disant* patron. The reply, however, became infinitely less important to the Colonel, when his agent at Mudbury wrote him word that a

gentleman of the name of Brassey was actively canvassing the electors for a candidate to be proposed whenever the vacancy should be declared, whose "appliances and means" were such as already to have prejudiced a decided majority of the electors in favour of the "great unknown."

However disagreeable this intelligence was to the Colonel, it was by no means a surprise; the fact being, that the influence which he proposed to sell he must first have bought; his personal weight in the borough ensuring him, under the provisions of the Reform Bill, nothing more than a priority of purchase. The sound straightforward sense of Jacob Batley hit this point in a moment, and before he had walked half-way down Davies Street with the Colonel, on his way from brother John's to Crockford's, on the night of the bargain, his sharp business-like mind had worked itself through the eloquent sophistry of Magnus, and by the time he reached "The Horn," where, as he anticipated, he took his punch and his cigar, he had come to the conclu-

sion that the Mudburyites were a disposable herd, and that he might just as well buy the flock himself in the field as employ a salesman. To it he went, delighted, as we have already seen, to beat his brother, who had sacrificed his fraternal affection to his zeal for his daughter's interests, and to jockey the Colonel, who was the friend of the man upon whose suggestion his brother had so acted.

Brimmer Brassey was a stirring person, and likely to make himself and his principal popular amongst the Radicals. He was always over-smartly dressed; his countenance was florid, edged with much black whisker; he wore his hat—a silk hat—on one side of his head; a coloured handkerchief round his neck; a chain, questionable as to metal, by way of guard to an equivocal watch, over a velvet waistcoat. He was well able to drink punch weak or strong, hot or cold, as the case might be, at any time, and in any quantity; smoked cigars if desired, and went the whole length of pipes if necessary; was upon intimate terms with several of the actors of the minor theatres; sang songs

which were not in print; told anecdotes of men and things which astonished the natives; had a friend who benevolently lent money to anybody who wanted it, upon the least imaginable security; and in fact was the most accommodating person in his peculiar line of the profession to which he did not do too much honour. At Mudbury, he was all in all; the way he talked, — the way he sang, — the way he dressed, — the way he drank, — and the way he paid,—were the theme of universal admiration; and, if the mere representative of the coming candidate did all this, what would the candidate himself do when he became the representative of them all?

When Magnus read his agent's accounts of this unexpected invasion of an enemy, and the evident defection of his friends, who, as parliament may reform parliament but has no power over human nature, were humanly weak enough to prefer performances to pledges, and pence to promises, had, with a zeal and eagerness known scarcely in any other than a political pursuit, welcomed the stranger, and, as it appeared,

most readily "taken him in," he was, as may be imagined, a little "put out." Who the stranger was, he had not yet discovered; but he was not long in obtaining the information; and the reader may pretty well ascertain, not only the feelings of the still dangling dabbling John Batley, who could not leave nibbling at the bait, although he felt he had not sufficient strength to bite, but of the Colonel himself when he found that John's brother, having taken advantage of a knowledge of the *carte du pays* extracted from, rather than afforded by him, had, having well-paved his way, been announced as a candidate whenever the vacancy was declared.

Magnus would have made it a personal matter with anybody else, and have called out the man who could so conduct himself; but, besides not wishing to have any such affair with such a person, especially being Helen's uncle, he felt perfectly assured that the opening letter of a correspondence, that way tending, would have been legally and technically replied to by Mr. Brimmer Brassey, whose name had become

painfully familiar to his ears through the communications of his now desponding emissaries at Mudbury.

To describe our volatile friend John Batley's feelings, when he heard the name of the probably successful candidate, would be difficult. Not only was he agitated and excited by finding Jacob thus positively and pointedly opposed to him, but because he felt perfectly assured, that this decided declaration of hostilities was occasioned by his having, at Mortimer's desire, "shut his doors" upon him. All the hopes of his life were exploded; and, in the present practical manifestation, he beheld the total annihilation of the expectancy upon the ulterior realization of which he had been for the last ten or twelve years living. Still Helen was settled — the great care of his life was off his shoulders; and, come what might, he should never want for anything so long as the Pension List lasted.

During the progress towards the completion of the contract between Helen and her wayward lover, for such he unquestionably was,

she felt gradually and day by day less enthusiasm, and even less hope of perfect happiness with the man of her choice. Now that the doubts and difficulties incidental to a lover's life had subsided into a certainty of securing the object of his affections, it seemed to her as if he already treated her with a sort of authoritative superiority which, with her natural intellect and animated disposition, she was by no means likely to be satisfied with. There was no deference in his manner towards her; while it was but too evident that he expected an agreement on her part in all his suggestions, and, in fact, something like implicit obedience to his dictations. Since his recovery from his illness, he seemed to have become watchful of her looks, and even of her smiles; and betrayed a restlessness of manner, which she had never before observed, if she lingered for a moment behind, in conversation with even the old chaperons to whom she had been so long entrusted. Nay, when Captain Stopper, with whom the reader may recollect Helen thought fit to act a little scene in the boudoir the day Mortimer

returned, presuming, naturally enough, upon her extreme good-nature upon that occasion, and the interest she appeared to take in his proceedings for the evening, spoke to her at the door of Howell and James's, as she was quitting the shop, Mortimer hastily and suddenly withdrew her from the *tête-à-tête*, and exclaiming in no sweet tone "Come, Helen, we are keeping other people from getting up!" handed her, not too gently, into the carriage; having done which, he walked away, without too kindly taking his leave, till dinner-time.

"Dear Lady Bembridge," said Helen, "what is the matter with Francis?—surely something must have happened to put him out of temper. Perhaps his late indisposition has left some little irritability in his constitution. Did you see how cross he looked, and how harsh his manner to me was?"

"There are things," said Lady Bembridge, "which are never seen or felt except by the person who is particularly interested in the conduct and manner of the other person or two. It is quite impossible to form an opinion

of the conduct of any existing being without being previously aware of his motives to action:—if indeed a young lady engaged to one man does think fit to bestow an encouraging smile upon another ——"

"What other, Lady Bembridge?" said Helen.

"My dearest, I meant no personal allusion to anybody in the world," said her ladyship; "I only meant generally to observe, that as lovers' love cannot exist without a due proportion of jealousy, anything like marked civility to a remarkably good-looking captain in the Guards might perhaps induce the intended husband of the young lady, being, as it should happen, by a few years the senior of the captain, to ruffle the serenity of a temper not naturally too serene at the best of times."

"Am I to understand," said Helen, "that my speaking to that silliest of all simpletons Captain Stopper, merely to answer a commonplace question, is to put Colonel Mortimer out of humour?"

"Dear Helen," said Lady Bembridge, "who

mentioned those names? I was merely supposing a case by way of accounting for a strange *brusquerie* which might somehow be conjured up."

Helen felt herself colour deeply, and rejoiced rather that the rapid pace at which she and her companion were driven hindered her chaperon from fixing her penetrating eyes upon her countenance, the flush of which, she was conscious, was followed by a sort of shudder which she could not control A world of thoughts rushed into her mind. It seemed that Mortimer felt it no longer necessary to gild over the weaknesses of his character, and that even before marriage he began to display a restlessness not very dissimilar from jealousy of his young intended wife. Helen gave her head a toss unconsciously, and said something to herself which it was quite as well nobody heard:—had the words reached Mortimer's ears, the chances are that their marriage, even near at hand as it was, would never have taken place.

Helen was, as Mortimer told her father he knew she was, noble-minded, generous-hearted,

and good, — purely and integrally good: no one who could have read her inmost heart, and have reviewed her most secret thoughts, would have questioned or doubted it for a moment: but she was high-spirited, and when conscious that she was right, fully prepared to act upon that consciousness, and treat with indignation and contempt the slightest suspicion cast upon her truth and sincerity. As she herself has said, her great fault was her candour, — her want of caution in the use of words, — what she thought, she spoke: so that however much she might have prejudiced some people against her, by such a course of conduct, nobody could charge her with deception or dissimulation. That she accused herself of a want of decision in the case of Lord Ellesmere, and attributed to herself a mode of proceeding not altogether reconcilable with the principles upon which she had always acted, merely proved how quick she was to perceive her own failings, and how ready to acknowledge them when discovered. The truth is, and it may be summed up in a few words, — Helen might be

led, but Helen was not to be driven: trust her, and she was fidelity itself; suspect her, and her pride predominated over every other feeling.

On the day in question, the dinner in Grosvenor Street was not what the domestic dinners there generally were. Mortimer continued gloomy; Helen remained reserved; Batley was out of spirits about Mudbury; Lady Bembridge was out of sorts about nothing; and, notwithstanding all this, the wedding was fixed for the following Friday.

CHAPTER VI.

"THAT connexion of yours," said Colonel Magnus to Mortimer, "has played the very deuce with me at Mudbury: I am completely undermined and blown up."

"Connexion of mine!" said Mortimer; "do me the kindness to permit the fact, that he is the uncle of my future wife, and bears her present name, to die and be lost in oblivion."

"Jack," said Magnus, "he has contrived to make good his footing where I felt myself quite secure; and, as I am at this time advised, has reduced his return to a certainty."

"Did you not," said Mortimer, "reckon somewhat too securely upon your influence?"

"Influence!" said the Colonel—"you know the fact—you know how I stood: I had the electors in hand, but I could not come to their

terms *impromptu.* It was, I confess, completely out of my calculation that this fellow should work his way into my labyrinth by dint of the clue I gave him myself, and actually supersede me on my own ground."

"Never mind," said Mortimer; "let him get into the House of Commons, or any other house, save mine; and the trifling mortification of being foiled at Mudbury will be admirably outbalanced by reading of his absurdities in Parliament, if his impudence should ever really be adequate to the making a speech."

"As for Mudbury," said Magnus, "of course to me, having so small a part of my property in its neighbourhood, I care nothing about losing it; in fact, it is hardly worth the trouble of keeping; but having actually come to an understanding with the 'free and independent electors' for fifteen pounds a head, (the Reform price of the Buckinghamshire borough I told you of,) and upon which tariff I had grounded the bargain, it is deucedly hard, after the fellow's having promised four thousand, which would just have put about twelve hundred

pounds clear into my pocket, and have given me the *éclat* of patronage, to find him not only trading on his own bottom, but spoiling the market by giving the "great unwashed" nearly twice as much as they had consented to take from *me*. However, we will get up a petition if he *is* returned, and if we can prove a case or two against him, let him look out."

"Ah! Magnus," said Mortimer, "would I could interest myself in such matters. I almost regret that I hadn't turned politician, and endeavoured to employ my mind in some engrossing pursuit, — something that might have kept from my memory thoughts of other days."

"Frank," said the Colonel, "your mind *should* be stored with thoughts of other days, — not of days that are gone, but of those bright days that are to come. As for memory, take a sponge — out with all the records. Look forward, man! — you are about to marry one of the loveliest girls in London, and are, consequently, an object of universal envy."

"Envy!" said Mortimer, "do they envy

me the possession of Helen? Ay, ay, there it is: — that envy will change its character. Helen — well — well, well — the die is cast, and we must hope for the best. I wish now — but it is too late — that we had arranged so as not to go to Sadgrove immediately after our marriage."

"'Gad, I don't see why, Frank," said Magnus: "what can be more lovely, — what more bright, more verdant, or more gay? I should say it was of all places in the world the best adapted for the scene of a honey-moon."

"True," said Mortimer, "it is gay and bright and green. All the charms of Nature combine to make it delightful — but — Amelia lived there — died there! I dread visiting it with Helen for the first time since her death."

"Come, come," said Magnus, "you must get over this; recollect how intimately I am acquainted with all the facts of that case. Your false delicacy, for so I must call it upon this occasion, is much on a par with the sensibility of a sentimental lady, who having lived with her husband what they call a cat-and-dog life,

when she becomes a widow, and the worthy gentleman is six feet under ground, begins to weep and wail and look back upon her past existence as something exquisitely delightful, and talks with enthusiastic veneration of the man whom, when alive, she quarrelled with every day of her existence, laughed at, ridiculed, and even"——

"Stop, stop," said Mortimer, "the cases are not parallel."

"They *are* so far parallel, Frank," said Magnus, "that no man on this earth could have behaved better or more honourably, more gallantly, more generously, than you did in that unfortunate affair of your comparative youth. It is quite true that Lady Hillingdon died at Sadgrove, but everybody must die somewhere, and"——

"My dear friend," said Mortimer again interrupting him, "I cannot, intimate as we have been for so many years, inspire you with one particle of my feeling upon such subjects. It is all useless to say why, or why not, I am affected by returning to Sadgrove; the senti-

ment is, I dare say, undefinable: — so it is — so let it be: but, problematical as the whole history is, I am miserable in my happiness."

Magnus, who (for often do friendships arise and subsist between men, apparently from a love of opposition of temper and character) could not in the slightest degree assimilate with Mortimer on certain points — he who, with his iron nerves and immovable countenance, went straightforward through whatever he undertook with a resolution not to be daunted by circumstances, and a firmness which no minor consideration could shake, was perfectly at a loss to comprehend why the recollection of Lady Hillingdon, so intimately associated with Sadgrove, should, now that she was dead and gone, at all interfere with the enjoyment of new pleasures and new pursuits there, the *locale* being quite as agreeable as it was during her life-time, and affording, by the change of circumstances, every prospect of increased gaiety and cheerfulness.

"My dear fellow," continued Magnus, "if your principle were to be acted upon, there is

not an heir in the empire who would rejoice in the death of his parent. The whole of our nobility, our monarchs themselves, are only tenants for life; and, if this repugnance to occupy the castles and palaces of their departed predecessors were to affect their minds, we should have all the chateaux and mansions in the empire shut up or converted into Workhouses or County Hospitals. The highest dignities of the nation, like the foggy sovereignty of the City of London, are all transferable. My Lord Mayor Sniggs on the ninth of November steps into the state coach, out of which My Lord Mayor Figgs stepped on the eighth, and finds himself bowed to by all the same people, sword-bearer, mace-bearer, train-bearer, liveried lacqueys, "postilion and all," who four and twenty hours before kootooed to the then Lord Mayor;—the reign there is certainly short, but certain. In loftier circles the same things happen, and the same unconscious coach and horses, driven by the same coachman, and swarmed upon by hanging clusters of the same gilded footmen, draw through the thronged

streets to-day, amidst the shouts and cheers of the people, the Monarch who succeeds to him that "died but yesterday," and who in one week finds himself precisely in the place of the one "just gone before," inhabiting the same rooms, attended by the same servants, eating off the same plate, drinking the well-stored wine from the same cellar, and hearing the same strains of music which so recently another loved to listen to; dispensing honours which erst flowed from other hands, and receiving the sweet adulation which so shortly previous had greeted other ears. If recollections like yours were to interfere with this——"

"Aye, aye," interrupted Mortimer again, "all that is different; succeeding to the estates and houses of one's ancestors is quite another affair; custom makes that nothing; no more than a man's sitting in his church under his father's monument, and over his grave, with the full conviction that, when the time comes, his bones are to moulder beneath the crimson cushion on which he slumbers out the sermon. Sadgrove is different. It was to Sadgrove

Amelia first came to me from her home. Solitary as was our after-life, she was the star that brightened its gloom. Charles," said Mortimer, with a tremulous agitation which startled his friend, " she lies buried there, — how can I bear to visit it with Helen? — poor girl, poor girl! — with such feelings ought I to marry her?"

" This is a burst of passion," said Magnus, " for which I confess I was not altogether prepared, Frank. If your feelings are really so strong upon this point, if I were you, I should most certainly not go to Sadgrove; — why not go down to *my* place, — stay *there*, — I will put everything *en train* this very day."

" No," said Mortimer, " thanks, thanks! but no, I *must* live in my own house sooner or later, and I will make the plunge at once, — gaiety shall be my resource, — my plan of retirement, as I have before foreseen, must be relinquished, and I will endeavour to destroy all the recollections I dread, by making Sadgrove as unlike what it was in other days as possible."

Those who read this evidence of the unsettled state of Mortimer's mind, the recollections with which it was teeming, the mingled repentance of his past faults with the lingering regrets for her who was the sharer of them, the doubts by which he was agitated, and the fears by which he was assailed, cannot shut their eyes to the difficulties of Helen's position—difficulties of which she herself was wholly unconscious. To those who could have known the real truth it must have been evident, that her career as Mortimer's wife would be little else than a struggle between certain unhappiness and the uncertain experiment of reclaiming a man of the world, not only from its present attractions but from the memory of the past.

That Batley was altogether blind to the difficulties of the case is not to be believed. Batley had been much in the habit of associating with Mortimer when Mortimer was younger, and Batley was not older than Mortimer was at the time of his offer to Helen. Their intercourse had been that which, as society goes, was the intercourse of men of the same time of

life. Frank Mortimer at seven and twenty, and Jack Batley at seven and thirty, were, in common acceptation, contemporaries; and in their various associations, long before any idea existed, on the part of either, that a nearer tie would bind them, Jack had seen enough of the character, and knew enough of the opinions and sentiments of his friend, to have questioned, had such a thought come into his head, his qualifications as a quiet domestic husband.

It was after the period of Jack's greatest intimacy with him, that the affair with Lady Hillingdon occurred; a circumstance not particularly well calculated to increase an admiration for his morals, although, in point of fact, the view which his friend Colonel Magnus took of the case was that which was generally received. During the life of Lady Hillingdon Mortimer was out of the world; on her death he launched into all sorts of excesses on the Continent, until, palled with various devices to which he had recourse in order to dissipate his grief for her loss, he returned home thirst-

ing for ease and retirement, and the sober comforts of a quiet life; his near approach to which rekindled the memory of those which he had enjoyed before, and created for him, in the confusion of his feelings, something nearly bordering upon misery in the midst of his happiness.

And in *this* mood he was destined to lead the beautiful Helen to the altar on the following Friday fortnight.

As to the change in his determination with regard to his "manner of life" in Worcestershire, it is but fair to state, that he was first induced to think doubtingly of the seclusive system by the manner in which Helen had received the *programme* of their proceedings in the country, with which, as the reader will recollect, he had a few evenings before favoured her. His announcement of the alteration of his plans was received by the young lady in a very different way. When he talked of balls, and fêtes, and parties, her bright eyes sparkled, and she felt gayer than she had for some time, not more on account of the prospect which opened to

her view, than because Mortimer himself seemed gayer than it had recently been his wont.

Looking at the state of society, abstractedly, all this reminds us very much of the story of the old gentleman and the young lady, which, on account of its prolixity, it is impossible to repeat. Its pleasures and amusements are but "the same thing over again," and nothing can be more unquestionably true than that, in a certain sphere of life, one party, one ball, one anything, is the alpha and omega of all; and what makes this monotony the more obvious is the fact that, since politics have asserted their influence over society, the nature of the amusement, whatever it may be, is not only unvaried, but the characters of the drama are unchanged. It is true that some, in the higher grade of political life, who having either retired from the arena, or grown wiser as they grew older, mingle, together, with their families, in the coteries of those ladies who, most honourably clinging to the politics of their husbands, maintain principles of a diametrically opposite character; but, generally

speaking, during the season it is only the scene of gaiety which is changed, the actors are the same; and even if the performances happen to be occasionally enlivened by the introduction of three or four new personages, they are so little diversified by the accession as to exhibit no remarkable change upon the surface.

The anticipation, therefore, of mixing with an entirely new community—of being herself a brilliant novelty to a fresh crowd of admirers, was exciting, and, to use her own phrase, "charming."

"That *will* be delightful," said Helen, with all her native frankness; "tired to death of the same faces, night after night worried beyond endurance with the same nonsense, talked to by the same people, it will be 'charming' to get into a new sphere; and even if the change be not for the better in a worldly sense, it will be a change, and that *is* something."

"The change," said Mortimer, "will not be so marked as you seem to expect. Several of our neighbours in the country are friends of yours in town: it is true that there are some

eight or ten families who seldom come to London, or mingle in its gaiety; but to those I am afraid you will not be disposed to devote your time and attention."

"Well, then, dear Francis," said Helen, "they will serve us to laugh at, at any rate."

"Why," said Mortimer, "not exactly that. They are people of rank, station, and consideration; looked up to and loved by their tenants and dependants; and, although their names do not figure frequently in those oracles of fashion, the 'Morning Post,' or the 'Court Journal,' they do not think so little of themselves as you seemed disposed to think of them."

"Oh!" said Helen, "if they are stiff, starchy people, that will soon wear off. Do these 'natives' come much to Sadgrove?"

"When they are invited," said Mortimer, looking rather confused, "by so kind a hostess as you will, I am certain, prove, they will, no doubt, be too happy to accept the invitation."

To this little complimentary speech Mortimer added, in an under tone, something which

had no defined meaning, but which he muttered to himself for the purpose of mystifying the end of his answer, and getting rid of the subject; Sadgrove, during his residence there, not having been a place to which, what Miss Helen Batley was pleased to call "stiff starchy people," were particularly likely to go. To the infliction of such questions and remarks, the "gallant gay Lothario" felt he must make up his mind, and the only consolation which he permitted himself, under the circumstances, was, that they were proofs either of Helen's innocence of the ways of the world, or ignorance of the worst points of his particular case.

"Oh, rely upon it," said Helen, "I will do the honours entirely to your satisfaction; and, as for popularity, you will see that we shall be the most popular people in the county."

"It depends entirely on yourself, Helen," said Mortimer; "they are not in the habit of often seeing such a person as you are. All you have to guard against is a disposition to ridicule the peculiarities which, to a mind like yours, offer, I admit, some strong temptations."

However, I shall not point out their oddities, but leave you to discover them, trusting to your caution after you have enlightened yourself."

Whether Mortimer would have given Helen a catalogue *raisonné* of his country neighbours, or not, it is impossible to say; for their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. John Batley with the intelligence that the member for Mudbury was that day gazetted for the foreign appointment which vacated his seat, and that a new writ had been moved for in the House; and this information he gave Mortimer, still in the hopes of something like encouragement, even at the eleventh hour, to start, and make an effort upon Magnus's interest.

The Colonel had left town for his place near this independent borough, and, *faute de mieux*, resolved upon opposing Jacob Batley, himself; not with any hope of defeating him, but for the special purpose of running him to all the possible expense which a contest might involve. But, when he reached the scene of

action, no Mr. Jacob Batley was there; he had quitted the field; but, nevertheless, the canvassings of the gallant Colonel were by no means successful; even they of the deputation who

"Swarming like loaches,
Had made their approaches
In ten hackney-coaches,"

to solicit him to represent them in Parliament, bowed coldly, and kept aloof in a manner sufficiently marked to convince the Colonel that his fate was sealed. As soon as the writ was sent down to the sheriff, the walls in and about Mudbury were covered with placards announcing to the free and independent electors that a candidate of truly constitutional principles would offer himself on the day of nomination, and entreating them to make no promises.

These placards were imported from London by Mr. Brimmer Brassey himself, who arrived at "The Royal Oak" late in the evening, and forthwith summoned his friend the native attorney, and the select few who were aware of the course of proceedings, in order to organize the plan of attack. Colonel Magnus announced

his intention of coming forward without fail; and the inhabitants of the pure and patriotic borough were in raptures at the thought of the contest.

The Blues, however, secret as were their machinations, and cautious as their proceedings, could not baffle the activity of the Colonel's agent. It was clear that the majority was safe, bought at so much per head; but, it was also clear, that Jacob Batley was not the man to represent the borough. Who the candidate would be, was still a profound mystery; and all that could be extracted from Mr. Brimmer Brassey, when questioned either in joke or earnest as to whom the gentleman might be, was —"You'll see—I say nothing—you'll find I'm right—rank, character, and money,—that's the thing gentlemen;—next Tuesday will enlighten you all—till then—I don't let the cat out of the bag:"—a bit of smartness, on the part of Mr. Brassey, which entailed upon the highly respectable individual who actually did come forward, the *sobriquet* of "Tommy," which he never lost; it being applied to him

by the electioneering wags of the place, as a suitable appellation for Mr. Brassey's cat which was not to be let out of the bag till the day of nomination.

The day of nomination *did* come, but with it no Mr. Jacob Batley. The Town Hall was thronged. Colonel Magnus made his appearance, and was loudly cheered, a circumstance which did not produce the slightest perceptible change in the expression of his fine countenance. Conscious that his friends had been bought, and certain of defeat, these manifestations of approbation sounded most discordantly; but, if he had been torn with burning pincers, or subjected to any other of the pious inflictions of the Holy Inquisition, not a muscle would have moved, not a cry would have escaped him.

The business of the day having been opened, a call for the candidates was raised, and Colonel Magnus stepped forward and addressed the assembled throng in a short speech, which was attentively heard, and loudly cheered at its conclusion: whereupon Mr. Stambury of Balls-

mere proposed, and Dr. Bulch of the High Street seconded, Colonel Magnus "as a fit and proper person to represent the independent borough of Mudbury."

When the equivocal noises which this announcement excited had in some degree subsided, Mr. Hogthorpe of Cackley rose and addressed the electors. Every period of his address was received with enthusiasm; every pause was filled up with cheering; and a tremendous shout of ecstasy rang through the Hall when, in conclusion, the honourable gentleman proposed Sir Christopher Hickathrift, Baronet, of Tipperton Lodge, as a candidate for their suffrages. This proposition being seconded, Sir Christopher, who had been sitting by the side of Mr. Brassey, rose up, and was, as the reader, after what he has heard, may naturally expect, saluted not only with loud cries of "Tom, Tom,"—"Puss, Puss," and such-like familiarities, but with some abominable imitations of the different noises in which cats in general delight, under the varied circumstances of their manifold lives.

Sir Christopher Hickathrift bore this persecution from the yet faithful friends of his ill-used opponent with infinite good-humour, although, as he confessed himself perfectly ignorant of the cause of the vocal performance with which he found himself greeted, he abbreviated his scarcely audible address, and when, after he had finished and the names of the candidates were proposed to the assembly, the show of hands was declared to be immensely in his favour.

Now came the Colonel's turn to be magnanimous: up he rose, and stated to the meeting that his object in presenting himself to them, and in permitting himself to be proposed as a candidate for their suffrages, was, to preserve the borough from being mis-represented by an individual whose name had been very freely mentioned as intending to offer himself to their notice that day. To avert that, which he could not but consider a calamity to the borough, he was ready to make every personal sacrifice. He need not disguise from gentlemen, so many of whom were aware of the fact, that

neither his health nor his pursuits were of a nature to render a seat in Parliament desirable. It was on their account, and with a deep regard for their interests, which he never could cease to feel, that he had come forward; and he would have persevered to the last vote on the register in fighting their battle. — (Loud cheers.) As it was, the case was entirely different — (cheers and mewings):—a most honourable and respectable gentleman of their own county had been proposed to them, — (more cheering and more mewing,) — and feeling assured that their interests could not be placed in better hands, he begged leave most respectfully to decline any further opposition to the honourable baronet's return, and to withdraw from the contest, begging, in retiring, to return his heartfelt acknowledgments to those gentlemen who had done him the honour to support him on the occasion.

After this came chaos, and after chaos the chairing of Sir Christopher Hickathrift, a ceremony which was rendered the more interesting by being performed during one of the heaviest

storms of wind and rain that had been known in those parts for fifty years.

It is right that the reader should be informed how it came to pass that this triumph was decreed to lawyer Brassey's cat instead of Jacob Batley, although it is probable he guesseth at it already. Sir Christopher had long been looking wistfully at the seat, but a want of resolution on his part had left it out of his reach. The promptitude and liberality, as it was called, of Jacob, startled the waverers, and when Sir Christopher's man of business in Mudbury ascertained from Mr. Brimmer Brassey the real state of the case as far as his influence went, he next proceeded to find out whether the man who possessed that new and pure influence was particularly anxious to sit for the borough himself. Jacob certainly did wish to sit, but that was not his main object; it was to defeat others that he was labouring; and as the electors could by no possibility entertain any personal regard for Jacob, and as Jacob felt no personal regard for anybody on the face of the earth, a hint conveyed from Sir Christopher's attor-

ney, through Brassey, that he might put four or five hundred pounds into his pocket by transferring his newly-bought friends to him, had its effect. Sir Christopher's lawyer and Brassey settled the arrangement, and Jacob, instead of being carried about the streets, and made to give a splendid entertainment at "The Royal Oak," in addition to all other charges and expenses thereunto incidental, gladly pocketed somewhere about four hundred and seventy pounds by the bargain, and on the day of the election dined alone at his favourite tavern, "The Horn," and finished his bottle of port previous to the imbibition of his accustomed glass of hot punch, chuckling with satisfaction at having defeated Mr. Mortimer's particular friend at a rate so extremely advantageous to himself.

On the Friday following this return, Grosvenor Street was enlivened by the appearance of various carriages at or about the door of the residence of John Batley, Esq., whence Francis Mortimer was to lead the blushing Helen to the altar in — it need not be mentioned — the church of St. George's, Hanover Square. The

proceedings upon such occasions, being always very similar, have been too often described to need a line of explanation here: — the same tears, the same lace-veils, the same *dejeuner*, the same dressing for church and undressing for the journey, the same congratulations, the same elegant travelling carriage,—all, all over again for the ten thousandth time. On this important day, Mortimer received from the hands of his father-in-law the treasure which he had, amidst a thousand conflicting feelings, won, and from which was to be derived his future stock of earthly happiness. Some of his prevailing gloomy doubts and recollections flitted across his mind as he knelt before the clergyman who performed the ceremony, nor was the last occasion upon which he had plighted his faith to one who had broken her's, absent from his memory; but these were

"Too slight alloys for all those grand
Felicities by marriage gained,
For nothing else has power to settle
The interests of Love perpetual:
An act and deed that makes one heart
Become another's counter-part,

And passes fines on Faith and Love
Inroll'd and register'd above,
To seal the slippery knot of vows
Which nothing else but death can loose."

As far as Mortimer was concerned, the last line was not altogether applicable. However, married he was, and the party at the breakfast was gay and numerous: Mr. Jacob Batley was of course not one of it, at the which John Batley was much vexed, and Helen, who, repulsive as were her uncle's manners, could not forget their relationship, was greatly pained; but his exclusion was a condition of Mortimer's, and so, excluded he was. Colonel Magnus was, of course, a guest, and performed his part in the play with all becoming dignity: he spoke but little, but what he did say was emphatic and solemn.

When *the* travelling carriage was driven up to the door, Mortimer beckoned Magnus to the back drawing-room.

"Well," said he, "you haven't enquired where we are going; and as you only arrived last night, perhaps you won't guess."

"Going!" said the Colonel, "I conclude to Sadgrove."

"No," said Mortimer, "I found it would not do: I couldn't bear it. We are going to Paris for a month or six weeks."

"Then," said Magnus, "I know exactly how that will end: you will go on to Florence or Naples, wherever your sister is, and not return for months."

"On the contrary," said Mortimer; "I am not in such good-humour with my sister, for refusing to come to *me*, as to think of going to *her*. If she had done as I entreated her, and come over to this country with her friend and her family, she would have been here now; she would have changed the whole character of Sadgrove; she and those whom she loves would have made a little domestic circle of our own, and with her principles and character she would have made an admirable companion for Helen, who, strange to say, is not quite spoiled by the world's adulation, but who still requires a woman of strong mind and correct views to regulate her conduct. My sister Jane is

that woman: — but no — she recoils from me — she despises me. I am unworthy of her; of that she has succeeded in making me conscious: further I do not intrude upon her. In Paris we may get rid of all but present thoughts: there is much good English society there, and there we may with propriety emerge from the ridiculous solitude to which custom dooms a newly-married couple for a certain time in England. We shall make it out there till shooting begins, when Sadgrove will be bearable; for the promise of plenty of birds will bring down plenty of friends, and we shall then, I trust, go on admirably."

Magnus, who, as usual, heard unmoved all the details of his dear friend's intended proceedings, satisfied himself that the ceremony which had just taken place was not to be considered as unquestionably productive of happiness to the parties concerned. The necessity of creating an artificial gaiety which Mortimer evidently found, the absolute importance of stifling old recollections, in short, the struggle which he was making merely to try an experi-

ment upon his own character and disposition, seemed to the immovable Colonel an affair replete with hazard; for it was quite clear that, added to the grief which still preyed upon him, and the mistrust which he had of himself, he had certain misgivings with regard to the steadiness of Helen, and the desire that somebody dear to him should be near her to direct her course through life, was no trifling evidence of the real state of his apprehensions.

"You have nothing to do," said Mortimer, "come over to us at Paris; we shall probably make some excursions during our stay—let us make a little party—what do you say?"

"I can say nothing," said Magnus, "for I am a creature of circumstances. I have a good deal of money locked up in those infernal Spanish bonds, and I do not like to leave them, for, with the game the brokers are playing in conjunction with the foreign news-writers; not to speak of the despatches written at Falmouth and forwarded to town by the Spanish packets, a man may be ruined before he knows where he is. But write to me—let me hear from you;

and, upon my honour, if business permits, I will run over with the greatest possible pleasure."

Even in this last request Magnus saw another instance of Mortimer's anxiety not to be left, as lovers ordinarily wish to be, altogether alone with his bride, and of a restlessness which augured ill for the future. He, however, pressed Mortimer's hand warmly, and permitted his features to assume an expression of mingled solicitude and congratulation, but it relapsed into its former rigidity, when Mortimer, on leaving him, said, "Charles, you have been with me once before upon an occasion like this."

Magnus playfully pushed him forward towards the drawing-room, where the bridal party were waiting his return to witness the departure of the happy couple. That Helen looked beautiful nobody could deny; that she looked happy is another affair. The entire change of character effected by the ceremony which had so recently been performed, the entire alteration of the duties of life produced by that sacred rite, the vast futurity opening to her view,

so different in its nature from the days that were passed; the entire surrender of herself to an authority which the day before she did not acknowledge, and the abandonment, to a certain extent, of that exclusive obedience which a few hours previously she implicitly yielded to her father; the whole combination of circumstances, the balance between perfect happiness and something less than happiness, the apprehension, the doubt, the dread, the joy, the sorrow,—for they all mingle in the heart of a bride at the moment when she hears the carriage-door close upon herself and her husband, and finds herself, for the first time in her life, confided to the care, the protection, and the love, of an alien to her blood, Helen deeply and intensely felt; and the pang which rent her heart as she received her fond father's parting kiss, the last of those kisses of devoted affection which were hers while she alone was all his care, and while she had none other to look to or love but him, was one of the bitterest she had ever endured. It seemed like the tearing asunder of a thousand tender ties, the

abandonment of home, and all its associations. She was gently forced from his embrace by the imperturbable Colonel, who led her to the door while she sobbed bitterly.

Mortimer was scarcely less affected; indeed the whole party seemed to sympathise so deeply in feelings which very few of them exactly comprehended, that the crying became general, and a much more melancholy scene was enacted than a man of the world would, in these times, expect to see at a funeral. Magnus, alone, remained calm, firm, and placid, and having deposited his charge in one corner of the travelling-chariot, and Mortimer having taken possession of the other, and pulled down the blind to avoid the gaze of the gaping crowd, the word was given to the postilions, and Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer were on their way to Dover at the rate of twelve miles an hour.

Batley made his excuses to his friends for retiring to his room, and shortly after three o'clock the house was deserted, and looked duller and more dismal than it had appeared during the whole time it had been in Batley's occupation.

CHAPTER VII.

Few were the days that elapsed after Helen's wedding before Mr. John Batley presented himself at Jacob's counting-house in Lilypot Lane; but vain were his attempts to obtain admission upon his first application. The request to see him, on the part of his brother, was pressed upon him by a confidential clerk: "Well," groaned Jacob, "if it must be so, it must. I may, for all I know, commit an act of bankruptcy by denying myself, considering I never dine here: let him in then—not that *I* want to see him; and I don't suppose I should if he did not want something of *me*. Show him in."

"My dear Jacob," said Batley, as he entered the counting-house in a sort of theatrical

pace, his lips smirking and his eyes twinkling, "I am delighted to"——

"That 'll do, sir,—that 'll do!" interrupted Jacob. "I know: the quality folks are gone, and now Jacob is suddenly becoming very delightful. If you have anything to say on business, be short; I have little time to lose upon talk."

"I merely came to say, my dear brother," said Jack, "that now I have cleared my house of the only man that ever objected to your society, I shall be too happy to see you again under my roof. What say you to to-day—only four of us—at a quarter past seven?"

"Psha!" said Jacob. "You know what Mr. Pitt said to the Duchess of Gordon when she asked him one day to come and dine with her at nine.—'Very sorry he couldn't, for he was engaged to *sup* with the Bishop of Lincoln at eight.'—Quarter past seven!—no: by that time *I* shall have dined, and had my port, my punch, and perhaps my pipe, ay, even before you think of sitting down. Why, d'ye suppose when I go

to your fine banquets in Grosvenor Street that I haven't dined before I come? What do the women do?—I have caught them at it when I was let into your house:—they eat like aldermen at luncheon: don't care a button for an old fogey like me—no:—before *me*, at it they go; cutlet after cutlet; a little bit of this, and a little bit of that; and eh!—psha!—heavy luncheons make delicate dinners. I'm up to *that!* No, Jack,—if I am not good enough for your company, I am better left out altogether."

"Nay," said Jack, "but you should do *me* justice: I am always delighted, as you know, to see you; and whether you dine before you come, and make *my* dinner, like Mr. Pitt's, a supper, I care not. You must know, Jacob,"—looking at him with a marked expression of affection, "you must know that to *me* you are always welcome. Colonel Mortimer is a man of the world, but he is peculiarly circumstanced; he is nervous,—sensitive,—and"——

"Yes," said Jacob; "that is to say, he has done a great heap of things of which he is naturally ashamed. He is all over irritability,

and plain speaking won't do: it never does with that sort of man:—and yet, the sort of man who cannot hear plain truth without wincing, is the sort of man you have chosen for a son-in-law! I could tell you something more about *him* and *his*, but I sha'n't. It is nothing to *me*, and I don't want to get into any worry; but I know what I know,—and what I know, Master Johnny, I keep to myself."

"Still," said Jacob, "you will come and dine with me."

"I won't now, and that's flat," said Jacob. "You fancy your invitations are favours; they are worries. Why should I, living in Lilypot Lane, take the trouble to dress myself up with silk stockings and pumps, as they call them, to go pottering up to Grosvenor Street to eat, or rather look at, for I never eat, a parcel of what you call entries or entrays, or something—meat made nasty; dishes with poor honest turkeys smothered with dabs of pudding, and suffocated with chestnuts and cray-fish, which never were meant to be near them; salmon pelted with capers; or

fowls bedeviled with lumps of nastiness —truffles you call them —lumps of fungus that dogs rout out of the ground under trees with their noses, and all that; tongues varnished like pictures; and a paw-about mess that you call pitchamele, or something, and all the rest of it? No, no: I am glad to see you, because I like you as well as I like anybody else; but all the green and yellow smishsmashery that you fancy fine, and get the gout by eating, I look upon with sovereign contempt. Give me a plain, clean, wholesome dinner at four o'clock, and no luncheon; — as to your fine feeds, keep them."

"Well," said Jack, "if you like plain cookery"——

"If!" exclaimed Jacob—"why, what cookery did you like when you were young? —you didn't care much about it *then*. Rely upon it, the best sauce for a dinner is a good appetite; but you have spoiled yours. I would bet you a guinea that I would make you eat more, if you would dine with me at 'The Horn,' at five say, — I'll give you an hour, five, — than

you have eaten for a year, barring luncheon — provided always that you pay your share. I never give dinners at a tavern, and I never dine at home. — You see, Jack : every tub on its own bottom."

"I should be very glad," said Batley, "to dine with you anywhere, and upon any terms, but to-day, as I have already said, I have a few friends to dine with *me*."

"Friends, have you?" said Jacob: "small party, I take it. What was the man's name that lived in the tub, and walked about with a lantern to look for a man? If you lived in a tub, you might walk your legs off before you found a friend; but as you occupy a house, and keep a table that you can't afford, the smooth-faced hypocrites come at your call, and do you the honour to eat your victuals and drink your wine, and then go away and laugh at you. I suppose that tom-foolery is nearly now at an end; having married Helen, I conclude you will get rid of your house."

"Why," said Batley junior, "that would look strange. The world would wonder"——

"There you go again," exclaimed Jacob. "The world! — why"——

"But," said John Batley interrupting his brother, "I have another object in view."

"Oh!" said Jacob in a tone expressive of the utmost indifference upon any subject connected with his gay relative, who, strange to say, with all his knowledge of the world, never despaired of interesting the merchant in his affairs, and rarely did anything without consulting him — "and what may *that* be — more wild geese, or more wild oats?"

"Neither," said John, "but the fact is"—

"Ah!" said Jacob, "that is what you generally begin with, before you bring out a bouncer. I know 'facts' are not always truths: but go on, because I have business of consequence to do, and"——

"I will be brief," said Batley. "The fact is, brother, that when a man has been used to a home and female society, he feels a loss when deprived of it, which nobody, dissimilarly situated, can properly appreciate. I lived happily with my poor dear wife, and at her death Helen was sufficiently grown up to be

a companion to me, and to rally round me female friends. She is now gone. I anticipate nothing but misery and wretchedness in the life I am destined to lead, and having long foreseen this, have for some time resolved upon marrying again."

"Marry again!" said Jacob,—"well, that *is* something to talk about. I never married once."

"And therefore are insensible to the delights of a home cheered by the presence and influence of an amiable woman," said Jack.

"Psha!" replied Jacob. "You have contrived to do remarkably well for a long time without 'the presence and influence of an amiable woman:' what 's the use of beginning again now?"

"Pardon me!" said John — "not exactly; while, as I have just said, Helen was with me, I felt that I *had* a home, — an agreeable home, where her presence ensured that sort of society in which, I admit, I rejoice; and now she is gone, it will be a blank."

"And yet," said Jacob, "you never were easy till she went."

"Can't you conceive it possible, my dear

brother," said John, "that a father may sacrifice his own personal comforts for the advantage of his child?"

"I can't enter into all that," said Jacob, "I never had a child. However, if you choose to marry, you will marry, I suppose, to please yourself; and as I can have nothing to do with it, I really don't want to hear anything about it. Here, Mr. Grub, bring me the letters; I can't waste *my* time."

"And you won't come?" said John insinuatingly.

"Psha! no," replied Jacob shaking his head; and John took his leave, not at all pleased with the tone of his brother's observations on his marriage, yet still hoping that time would soften all asperities, and that when he did die, if his death should precede his own, he should find in his will a striking proof of the affection which he had never discovered in his behaviour while alive.

That John Batley should feel disposed to marry again does not seem so extraordinary. John had married young,—was a young father,

— and, as he truly said, the relative ages of himself and Helen had, in some degree, alleviated the grief which he felt for the loss of her mother, by placing her in the position of mistress of his house, at a somewhat premature age, perhaps, — but there she was, — and, as he vainly endeavoured to impress upon Jacob's mind, — *there* was female society; and John liked female society: he had been a sort of male coquette all his life, and loved dangling at fifty-four as much as he did when he was less than half that age; and it is astonishing (perhaps not, because the case is so common) that a habit of that sort does not wear off with time as might be expected. The man of fifty-four flirts, and is not ill received; but he does not appreciate the mode of his reception; he does not feel himself much older than he was, five-and-twenty years before; he scarcely sees an alteration in his own person; all that he wonders at is, the extraordinary flippancy and forwardness of boys of five-and-twenty, forgetting that when he was of their age he considered an old fellow of fifty-four a " regular nuisance."

Wonderful, however, have been the changes in society within the last half century: the march and influence of age have been neutralized to an extent which our grandfathers could not have believed, and certainly never anticipated. Fifty years ago, the idea of a man of sixty in a black neckcloth, with curls and trousers, and a fancy waistcoat, with amethyst studs in his shirt-bosom, dancing quadrilles, never would have entered into the head of a human being. The dress might have been as gay, or gayer, but it would have been made up of pomatum and powder and a bag or a club, with shorts, and shoes and buckles. At one period, the pig-tail, which superseded the club-knob which had previously succeeded to the bag, would have been indispensable; nay, there are at this moment half a score matured gentlemen, who thirty years since sported tails, knobs, and pigs, with powder and pomatum, aforesaid, walking the assemblies of London in picturesque-coloured wigs, fancy waistcoats, and symmetrically-cut pantaloons.

The question was, what sort of woman Batley

would marry? and the question again resolved itself into another, what sort of woman would marry Batley? One of the cleverest of her sex said, that the most dangerous part of a man was his tongue; and no doubt what her ladyship said was true; for when the mind is won, the heart and everything else follow. To those who knew Batley best, it would, no doubt, have appeared most probable that he would have sought for noble blood; but when a man of Batley's standing takes that line, he must not expect to have it young. Lady Angelim, and Lady Seraphina are, no doubt, to be gotten hold of under such circumstances; but they must be poor and elderly; and it remained with Batley to decide, whether to flourish amidst "the sublime and beautiful" in Burke's Peerage, with a sort of negative reception in the family of the lady, were of sufficient importance to outweigh the attractions of a younger bride of less pretension. What he did in this momentous affair a little time and patience will show.

Finding all efforts to interest his brother in

any of his projects or propositions useless, he left him to the enjoyment of money-getting, which seemed the absorbing passion of his life, and resumed, or rather increased in brilliancy, a career of gaiety, by which he hoped to dispel the gloom of his desolate home, and bring himself into notice in his new character of a disposable widower.

The days and the weeks wore on, and the honey-moon of Mortimer and his beautiful Helen was over, and yet no symptoms appeared of their return to Sadgrove. Helen, tired of Paris, and the praise which was lavished on her beauty and accomplishments, sought for change; but, whenever she touched upon home, Mortimer interposed some very good reasons why they had better wait a little; and this was repeated so often as to protract their stay in Paris for nearly seven weeks, during which period Mortimer received several letters from his sister, to which he duly returned answers; but Helen observed that he never made the slightest reference, in his conversations with her, either to their object or contents. She thought

he seemed more gloomy than usual after receiving one of them—for he had relapsed into gloom very soon after his marriage; and although she did not like to make any enquiries about the correspondence, she still felt uneasy at perceiving what she considered a want of confidence in her, in the conduct of her husband.

This feeling induced her to write, as was her wont, a letter to her father, from which the reader may infer that the harmony of their union was not altogether so sweet as might have been expected. I am able to submit it.

"Dear Father, Paris.

"Your kind letter was most welcome, and I will take care of the commissions you speak of, although a little puzzled as to the person or persons for whom the gaieties are designed. I speak sincerely to you when I tell you that I am tired to death of this Paris, one lives so constantly abroad, so constantly before the world. I don't know how the French themselves feel, but I do think there is nothing like home in Paris,—and Paris is France.

"I am a good deal vexed by Mortimer's manner; I do not know why, but he seems to me to have something constantly weighing upon his mind. He is as kind to me as any human being can be to another, and I enjoy his society beyond all description, but I do think something worries him constantly. I would give the world to go to Sadgrove, as he originally proposed, but whenever I mention it, he always interposes some objection which I suppose is good, but which does not always appear to me sufficient. He has been writing a great deal to his sister, and seems very much to wish me to be known to her; but, from all I can gather, she declines the *honour;* why, I cannot exactly imagine. Colonel Magnus, as you know, has been staying with us for the last ten days, and, somehow, I begin to dislike him more than ever. He and Francis talk about matters of which I am wholly ignorant, and they laugh, and look grave by turns; and I believe the procrastination of our return to England is somehow connected with Mrs. Farnham's answer to Francis's last letter. I wish I were at home

with all my heart. I do not, because I must not, mean my own dear home with *you*, but I mean Sadgrove, which is *my* home now.

"You cannot think, dear Pappy, how strange it seems to be treated with a sort of formality and restraint by one whom one loves. You always told me when you came home all that you had heard and seen. You expressed your wishes, imparted your thoughts, and all without reserve or constraint; but Francis does not treat me so. If anybody speaks to me civilly, I mean any of these gay Parisian dandies for whom I care nothing, of course, but to whom one must, in pure good breeding be commonly civil, he looks grave and almost angry; and when I, seeing that, (for, as you know, I can see as quickly as my neighbours,) entreat him to take me to England and to his favourite place in Worcestershire, he knits his brows, and even—don't be shocked, Pappy—swears, and then begins to talk of his sister, and her disinclination to visit it. Whatever the cause of this agitation may be, I am certain that Colonel Magnus knows what it is. I know, Colonel

Magnus is a great favourite of yours. I never could like him, and I must own my feelings towards him have not assumed a more favourable character since he has joined us here.

"During our excursion to Tours, Francis visited some old friends of his, a Count and Countess St. Alme; they returned with us here, and we have seen a good deal of them since. She is an Englishwoman, but not exactly to my taste, — handsome, and somewhat apt to do what you have sometimes scolded, at least as much as you were in the habit of scolding me, for doing,—I mean saying off-hand things. I certainly do not pretend to equal her in that sort of talent or in knowledge of the world; whether I am grown fastidious, or whether, being married, I have become graver, I do not exactly know, but I cannot quite like her; she seems, however, a great favourite with Francis. She has one son, of whom she appears dotingly fond, and I do not wonder, for he is a remarkably engaging boy.

"I wish, my dear Pappy, you would write

to Francis and urge his return to England; I am sure we should be much happier—at least, I know I should—there, than here. Francis has bought me some beautiful china, and some trinkets that will dazzle you; but what are trinkets if the heart is not at ease?

"Colonel Magnus brings accounts of your being particularly gay, and says that your little dinners are quite the rage. I am glad to hear of this, for although, dutiful as I am, I did not flatter myself that the loss of my society would be fatal to your happiness, still, we are such creatures of habit, that even so dull a companion as I must have been, may be missed. I even miss the flirting and barking of poor dear little Fan, and should jump for joy to hear her welcome me to Grosvenor Street—I hope she is well.

"I have written to-day to Lady Bembridge, but I have only heard from her once since we have been here. I wrote also to poor dear uncle Jacob, but not a word of answer. I wanted, if possible, to soothe his angry feelings towards Francis,—as for Francis's feelings towards

him, I fear they are beyond my healing art. I have tried once or twice to introduce the subject, but have been stopped on the instant. I believe if there is anybody uncle Jacob cares for, it is me, although I have never experienced any farther mark of his affection than the negative advantage of not being spoken to by him quite so roughly as everybody else.

" "Thank you very much for your kind letter of the 8th, and for the little bit of news it contained. I was telling Francis some of the gossip, but he did not seem to like it; and, when I was setting forth the extraordinary indiscretion of poor Mrs. Z., he took me up rather parentally, I thought, and said 'Helen, we all have our failings,—let us be sure we are more perfect ourselves than our neighbours before we remark upon them,'—so I held my tongue like a good and dutiful girl, and determined for the future to avoid being snubbed. Write, however, like a dear good Pappy as you are, and be assured I shall be most grateful for anything you can tell me; for, next to being in

England, and with those whom I have so long known and loved, my greatest pleasure is hearing from them; and so adieu, dear Pappy, and believe me truly and sincerely

"Your affectionate child,

"HELEN MORTIMER."

Batley read this letter with mingled yet opposite feelings. The affection of the daughter which it displayed pleased and delighted him, but he was not quite satisfied with the tone which she assumed in the character of the wife. It was evident that the reserve which characterized the conduct of Mortimer had generated something like distrust on the part of Helen; and it even appeared to Batley, from the total absence of any reference to his name as "uniting in kind regards," or joining in remembrances to his father-in-law, as if he had been in no degree a party to her writing. It was clear too that Helen was not so happy as she had expected to be; and it was equally clear to Batley that he remembered some story of an old attachment of Mortimer, older than that

of Lady Hillingdon, and of a subsequent marriage of the lady to a foreigner; and, if he had not himself been in full pursuit of his present matrimonial object, he would have taken instant steps to ascertain the precise facts of this nearly forgotten historiette; as it was, he had scarcely time to think over his daughter's letter, although its perusal left upon his mind a sort of nervousness and anxiety which qualified the whole of his day's occupation, and of the real cause of which he was himself scarcely conscious.

At this period of our history, in which some new mystifications begin to arise, it may not be altogether amiss to let the reader glance his eye over a letter, one of a series which Mortimer received at the period to which Helen referred in her's to her father. It may be considered, as the housekeeper in Morton's excellent comedy of "Speed the Plough" says, "vastly ungenteel" to betray confidences, and above all, expose a lady's correspondence; but, considering that the recipient of the letters was her brother, and that we shall get more satis-

factorily at facts than we could by any other means, we must waive ceremony and put upon record one of the missives with which the exemplary Mrs. Farnham favoured, or rather troubled, Colonel Francis Mortimer. An extract, however, will suffice.

"I cannot," says this exemplary lady, "bring myself yet to believe what I am positively told is true. Francis, my brother, my beloved erring brother, you already anticipate what I am going to say; let me be right in my anticipations of what you will answer. I hear that you and your young wife are living upon terms of the greatest intimacy with the Count and Countess St. Alme. I am sure this must be calumny, it can *not* be true—no, no, my dear Francis, until you admit the fact yourself I will not believe it. Truly, indeed, has it been said, that the world is prone to form its estimate of a man's character from the early indiscretions of his youth; and, thence dating, it is a difficult task to work upwards against the stream which runs fast against him; but, forgive me, as you know how I love you, a recur-

rence to what in youth were indiscretions renders the case hopeless. Francis, recollect I am old enough to remember all the anxieties of our poor father; recollect that you, the idol of both your parents, were the constant object of their care, the constant theme of their conversation to me. Recollect how much you confided in your only sister: let me not believe the history they tell me: —the Countess St. Alme the associate of your young wife!—no, Francis, no,—they libel you.

"Your repeated invitations to England, I tell you, are useless; I have already given you my reasons. But do not yourself delay returning to your proper home,—take there your innocent bride,—be good,—be happy:—let me entreat, implore you, do this; and this I earnestly urge upon you, convinced that all I hear of this Countess is groundless. If it should be true!—but no, it cannot be:—if it should, let me, with all the power I may have over you, press your instant removal from Paris. Surely, what you have already suffered,—the torture that you have endured,— the

misery you have experienced, — must of themselves act as incentives to such a step: — if not, Francis, let a sister's prayers, — prayers breathed to Heaven by one who, through a life now past its zenith, never has wilfully or willingly offended the sacred power to which she appeals, move your heart and fix your resolution. Go, my brother! — do not expose yourself, and the young creature whom you have taught to love you, to trials which may, in their results, destroy her happiness, and for ever ruin your still redeemable character."

From this we gain something like an insight into matters of which poor Helen was evidently ignorant; and yet she had seen enough in the boldness of the Countess, and the subserviency of the Count, to feel a decided distaste to the society of the favourite associates of her husband.

Mortimer's answer to his sister admitted the fact of a renewal of his acquaintance with the Countess, but denied either the impropriety or indelicacy of it. The Count and Countess St. Almé were a most amiable couple, univer-

sally esteemed, and generally visited,—and why should they not be? The Countess was an English lady of birth and station, and had married an elderly gentleman of the name of Plocksford, who, some eighteen years before, had died, and left her with one son, which son was, as Helen had stated, his mother's idol, and naturally so, for, as she says in her letter, he was "a remarkably engaging boy."

After leading an irreproachable life as a widow for three or four years, she married the Count St. Alme, a smallish French gentleman with a particularly long red-tipped nose and thin legs, by whom she had in the first year of her marriage a daughter. The child, born somewhat prematurely, died, and since that period the Count and Countess had had no farther increase to their family.

That, as Helen saw, the Countess talked, and laughed, and even flirted, nobody denied, —and what the harm?

"Where Virtue is, these are most virtuous."

Although Helen herself, young as she was, had already suffered not a little, for a gaiety,

and even forwardness of manner, of which she admits herself, in her letter to her father, to be conscious; still people only said, "What a lively creature!" — "What an odd creature!" — "What a pleasant creature!" — "What extraordinary things she *does* say!" — for upon a principle not unfrequently recognized, that a free tongue is the safety-valve for exuberant spirits, and that the "silent stream runs deepest," voluble volatile ladies of this school generally escape the graver imputations which those who, as Horace Walpole says,

"Know the country well,"

are apt to cast upon the quieter and more calculating of their own sex.

Something, however, it was too clear, *had* occurred (what, nobody can surmise) in Mortimer's youthful days, which rendered the renewal of his intimacy with the Countess St. Alme extremely objectionable in the eyes of the exemplary Mrs. Farnham; and the circumstance coming to her knowledge just as she had admitted to her friend and associate at

Naples that her heart was beginning to melt, and that she really thought she might be induced to visit Sadgrove, put an end to all further hopes, or even negotiations, upon that particular point.

We have already seen, and the reader has already perhaps appreciated, the difficulty which Mortimer felt in revisiting the former scene of his equivocal happiness and certain misery. It must be clear — at least if Mrs. Farnham be supposed to know the truth, — as regarded the Count and his lady, that the attraction, which even Helen saw the latter possessed for her husband, acted still more powerfully as a repellent from Sadgrove; but perhaps even the reader is not prepared to hear, that failing in his sister, and greatly disturbed by her lecture, the St. Almes were invited to supply her place, and to form three of the family circle at his paternal home.

"I have been endeavouring to persuade the Count and Countess," said Mortimer, with a carelessness of manner well calculated to disguise the deep interest he took in Helen's

reply, "to go over and pass a month or six weeks with us at Sadgrove."

"Then you are really going to England, Francis," said Helen, exactly as he anticipated.

"Of course, love," said Mortimer: "where should a man live but in his own house?"

"No," said Helen, — "there we perfectly agree; only by prolonging your stay here, you give no practical proof of your disposition to go.'

"I hoped," said Mortimer, "that my sister would have come to us and gone with us, but she throws me over; and I really think — you know, dear Helen, a country-house, quite alone, is not delightful."

Is it not extraordinary that Sadgrove, and the solitude imposed upon him during his residence there by circumstances, were so strongly fixed in his mind, that he could not imagine the possibility of rallying round him and his charming wife all that he chose of society? He dreaded the recollection of what it had been; and in order to render himself secure from a repetition of what had happened there,

endeavoured to secure, by way of enliveners, two persons who, if what Mrs. Farnham implied was true, would not have objected to make it agreeable even under the former *regime.*

"Not quite alone," said Helen. "But why should we be quite alone? — there are whole crowds of people who would be too happy to come to us."

"I see," said Mortimer, "you dislike the St. Almes."

"Not I, indeed, dear Francis," said Helen, —(which, having glanced over her confidential letters, we happen to know was not entirely truth.)—"I think he is rather dull and prosy, —and odd,—and queer; but" ——

"And the Countess?" said Mortimer — "is she too lively? — are her *bon-mots* too frequent?—does she startle you by her repartees? I should think not, Helen; for having yourself been, like Britannia in Thomson's song—

'The dread and envy of them all,'—

I mean of all the beaux, belles, and blues of London, for two or three seasons, you must understand the play of such artillery, and know

that the brightest wit is not incompatible with the purest heart."

Helen paused, and felt herself colouring up; her pure heart *did* beat:—Mortimer had shot his bolt beyond the mark. Who had even insinuated that the heart of the Countess St. Alme was not pure? Who had complained of the gaiety of her conversation? Why did Mortimer recur to the manners and conduct of his wife, by which he had been captivated?—or why lay a peculiarly strong emphasis on the words "two or three seasons?"

"I am sure," said Helen,

"With a smile that was half a tear,"

"anybody, dear Francis, that you like, I like."

"No, Helen," said Mortimer, "I really do not require any such implicit obedience as that; I never could myself afford it. You love your uncle Jacob—I hate him; and however much I love *you*, I never could bring myself to endure him. What I meant, dear girl, was, to consult you whether it would be agreeable to you to have the St. Almes with us for a few weeks."

"Oh! quite agreeable," said Helen, — "quite." And she was again near bursting into tears.

"Well then," said Mortimer, "I will ask them,—or at least you shall — it will look better: and, to tell you the truth, I think, — and indeed that was one of my motives for speaking to you about it, — I think the Countess fancies you do *not* like her; so an invitation this evening, in one of your most winning ways, will convince her to the contrary, and we will start for England in two or three days."

Poor Helen was now completely trapped. She saw by Mortimer's manner that he had made up his mind that these odious people should accompany them to England, and remain on a visit with them. She felt such an awe, — not of Francis, but of the Countess, — that she dared not venture even to remonstrate against the proceeding, although she was aware that, for a certain time at least, it would be fatal to her own comfort:—besides, taking it upon other grounds, the admission made by Mortimer, that the enjoyment of

his young wife's society, without some other adjuncts, would not ensure his happiness, was by no means either gratifying or consolatory.

Nobody can duly appreciate the state of Helen's feelings during the interval between the conversation with her husband and dinner-time. Her whole mind was occupied with the duty she was forced to perform, when she and the Countess should be left alone; for Mortimer and Magnus had drilled the Count into the social but extremely ungallant English custom of "sitting and sipping" a little wine, after the ladies, according to the manner of the House, had retired. At dinner she was pale and flushed by turns: she reflected upon all the plans and schemes she had suggested for the employment of her time at Sadgrove; and perhaps (for as to any sinister motives on the part of Mortimer, even if there had been any just cause to doubt him, she never suspected them) — perhaps she did not feel altogether pleased with the idea of taking possession of her little sovereignty associated with a lady, whose maturer age gave a greater confidence in her

intercourse with the world, and who already began to treat her rather as a promising young woman, than as Helen had been treated "for a season or two," as one of the first class of London beauties.

The task was to be performed, and so entirely did Mortimer rely upon Helen's implicit obedience to his wishes on the subject, that he communicated to the Count, shortly after the ladies went, the fact that Mrs. Mortimer was most anxious that he and the Countess should accompany them to England. Lucky, therefore, was it, — or unlucky, as the case may be,— that Helen did as she was bid; and dressing her fine face in smiles the sweetest, made her request to her vivacious visitor, who, however pleased she might be with the invitation, did certainly not appear so much surprised as a lady might naturally be expected to be at an impromptu of that sort. The Countess said,—That she should be delighted, if the Count would agree to it, there could be no doubt; and it would above all be such a charming opportunity for Francis Blocksford

to see a little English society. "Oh, you are so good, Mrs. Mortimer!"

The Count had not been in the salon five minutes before the announcement was made to him,—his permission asked, and granted; and so much having been achieved, Helen resolved to settle herself into a course of beginning to like the Countess, to see the bright side of her character, to endeavour to appreciate her oddity, and laugh at her liveliness. But Helen, who was as quicksighted as her neighbours, felt a sort of check when her eye glanced over the persons of Mortimer and Colonel Magnus, who were standing in a window sipping their coffee, and evidently talking over the arrangement; and she saw upon both their countenances an expression which conveyed to her mind that in some way, or for some reason which she could not exactly define, they were enjoying the triumph Mortimer had obtained over her wishes and feelings, and that in the features of the Colonel there was depicted a kind of exultation at having made the suggestion himself.

As time will develope all the effects of these proceedings, it is scarcely necessary here to say more than that orders were forthwith despatched to have Sadgrove prepared for the reception of its master and mistress; that invitations were forwarded to several of the friends of both to join the circle; and that every sort of gaiety that could be devised for the purpose of welcoming the party should be displayed: in fact, all the doubts and delays which previously served to cloud the mind of Mortimer seemed to have vanished, and in less than ten days the Mortimers, Magnus, the St. Almes, Master Francis Blocksford, and all, were on their way to the

"Fairest Isle!—all isles excelling."

CHAPTER VIII.

The arrival of Mortimer and his bride at Sadgrove was celebrated by a kind of fête, prepared, to be sure, under his own directions, and paid for out of his own pocket; but it had, or was intended to have, the effect of a spontaneous ebullition of popular feeling, with which Helen was to be gratified and flattered, — flattered, as far as her share of the attention went, — and gratified by seeing how much her husband was esteemed by his tenants and neighbours: — and there were sheep roasted, and barrels of ale broached; and there were music and dancing, and flowers and fire-works, and every available display of rural festivity.

The poor neighbours did, in truth, rejoice; not, perhaps, that Mortimer had returned, — for he had lived, during his former residence

there, in a manner and under circumstances not likely to render him so popular as he wished both to fancy himself and make them believe he actually was, but because the shutting up of the "great house" of a small place is always a misfortune to the humbler neighbours; one of whom was heard to say upon the present occasion, "It does my heart good to see the great kitchen-chimney smoke again!"

These and other "external" manifestations of gaiety might perhaps have been somewhat consolatory to Mortimer, but it must be confessed, that after two or three, or three or four, or four or five days had elapsed, and he did not find the drive from the lodges to the house ploughed up by carriage-wheels, he began to feel the restless anxiety which universally characterises a man of doubtful reputation. The clergyman of the parish had called without his wife and daughters, and the attorney had tittuped up on his cob; but the Muffledups of Wigsbury, the Bigstuffems of Dogsford, the Cattletons of Lapsworth, the Stiffgigs of Snapsworth, and the Peeps-

burys of Littleworth, came not; and these people, although to be found nowhere but in their native county, and in Burke's "History of the Commoners," *were* something: in fact, they combined in themselves the principal landed interest of that part of the country, and were, moreover, the "stiff, starchy" people of whom Helen had such a constitutional horror. Bores they would unquestionably have been had they come, but to Mortimer their not coming was infinitely more painful than their society. Deeply imbued, as they were, with the primitive simplicity of their rural ancestors, they did not consider the gaiety and innocence of Helen adequate to the purification of the atmosphere of Sadgrove, nor think the libertinism of Mortimer sufficiently qualified by the change in his condition which had taken place before his return to the scene of his former indiscretions.

This was a serious blow to Mortimer. For the Muffledups, the Stiffgigs, the Peepsburys, and all the rest of their tribes, he entertained the most sovereign contempt, but therefore

did he the more deeply feel the disinclination which they evinced from his acquaintance—not as far as himself was concerned, but because the manifestation of such a sentiment might produce an effect upon Helen likely to degrade him in her estimation.

This marked inattention, to call it by no more positive name, could not long escape the notice of Helen; but short as had been the period during which she had been Mortimer's wife, there was something in his look and manner which, to a being all quickness and perception, checked her from making any enquiries into the cause of the absence of the promised visitors.

Mortimer absented himself from church on the first Sunday after their arrival at Sadgrove: there might have been more reasons than one for this omission of duty. The associations of circumstances connected with the dead might have kept him aloof from a trial which would probably have proved too strong for even his firmness; while the circumstances of his non-association with the living might have induced him not to provoke any exhi-

bition of a positive refusal of intercourse with him or his family. Helen regretted his absence; but when she and the Countess St. Alme returned, she remarked to her husband that he was not singular in his determination of not going, for that there was scarcely anybody in the church except the humbler parishioners and neighbours — two of the *non-juring* families having pews therein.

" Magnus," said Mortimer to his *Fidus Achates*, " I am by no means pleased with my reception in the home of my ancestors: something tells me that I am not welcomed as I ought to be here."

" My dear fellow," said Magnus, " rely upon it, it is the reputation of your lovely wife that keeps these timid rustics away—they are afraid of her: her sarcastic turn is known, and as you have yourself told me of your fears that she might scare a whole herd of them by one observation, so they, depend upon what I say, are terrified lest she should annihilate them: — nobody likes to be laughed at."

" Nay," said Mortimer, " but, after all,

they are not so decidedly obnoxious to ridicule as all that comes to: they are certainly not of the world, worldly,— in the acceptation of that word as implying fashionable, or gay, or easy, — but they are only correctly dull and eminently respectable:—no; the truth is, that they are of my sister's school of morality, and poor Helen will suffer for my earlier transgressions."

"'She seems," said Magnus, "to have overcome the disinclination from the Countess St. Alme which you suspected her to have felt in the outset of their acquaintance."

"So I perceive," said Mortimer; "and I begin to be as desirous that their intimacy should stop where it is, as I before was that it should exist. The Countess is one of my earliest acquaintances; and although I most solemnly assure you that my sister's hints and suspicions about any closer connexion are groundless, I own that I was glad to meet her again, and was pleased with her society at Paris; but I am not quite sure that I ought to have acted upon the impulse of a moment,

and have made her an inmate here, especially at starting: the daylight rouge, to say nothing of the arched brows not altogether Nature's own, are not calculated to melt the ice of Helen's 'stiff, starchy' people; and, if I had reflected, I should have anticipated the disadvantages of such an association. However, it is done, and by way of truism, Charles, 'What is done cannot be undone:' the course now to pursue is, to render the circumstances less remarkable by filling the house with London friends; amongst a crowd of tigers, my vivacious hyæna will not shine out so remarkably."

The reader will perceive by this bit of confidential conversation between Magnus and Mortimer, that the suspicions of Mrs. Farnham, with regard to the Countess St. Alme, were groundless as far as her brother was concerned: and, if the reader will take the trouble to sift every suspected *liaison* of a similar nature to the bottom, he will probably find that ten out of twelve of all such histories are equally groundless. Under the circumstances, the prudence of Mortimer's conduct in in-

viting her to Sadgrove was, as far as society was concerned, exceedingly questionable: but it is as well for us to set him right with regard to conduct which, had his sister's views been correct, would have assumed a deeper colouring than that of a mere want of consideration.

In pursuance, however, of his new determination, invitations were sent off to the most agreeable of Mortimer's friends; and Lady Bembridge and Mrs. Delaville, and one or two more very proper ladies, were bidden, by way of "ballast" to the gayer portion of the party. Jack Batley was of course amongst the chosen, and every preparation was made to gratify the sporting propensities of the men in the morning, and secure the gayer and more graceful amusements for the ladies in the evening.

There seemed to Mortimer but one of two courses to pursue. The neighbours certainly "fought shy" of him, therefore his only line was to withdraw within his own circle, and exclude all those who did not seem to wish to be included, while he contrived to make Sadgrove celebrated for the gaiety and agreeable-

ness of its parties, the varied character of its amusements, and so pique the " puritans" into a regret that they had been so extremely fastidious in the outset.

Helen certainly was not so much enchanted with her rural position as she had anticipated; her natural disposition for sly satire and ridicule found no materials to work upon, nor did her mind exhibit any congeniality with those pursuits which Mortimer had hoped might render her an object of esteem and veneration with the poorer neighbours. The oddness of manner, the strangeness of accent, the mispronunciation of words, or their misapplication to any subject under discussion, into which any of the poor people might be betrayed, were beyond her power of resistance, and she laughed outright, much to the discomfiture of the rustics. In fact, her's was a London mind; and all her fancy for the country, mixed up as it was with marriage and settlement, was little else than an anxiety for change of place and station, blest with the society of the man of her heart.

The clergyman of Sadgrove, a most exemplary man, was amongst those who had paid a visit to the "hall." But, with all his piety and all his zeal for doing good, he was no beauty, and this fact destroyed all his merits in Helen's eyes. It must be confessed that he was what the people call an "object;" and so much did this operate to his disadvantage with Mrs. Mortimer, that she could not trust herself to discuss with him sundry matters relative to Sunday schools and Infant schools, and other establishments in the maintenance of which he was particularly active, lest the extraordinary cast of his countenance and the peculiar tone of his voice should betray her into some inadvertent breach of decorum most unseemly under their relative circumstances.

Mortimer, however, considered it highly important to be extremely benevolent, and to be seen frequently going about the village with the reverend doctor, to consult him as to the best mode of providing for both the spiritual and temporal wants of his parishioners, and, by a moderate sacrifice of time and money, acquire a good

name in his neighbourhood, or at all events to do his *possible* to get rid of a bad one.

It ought not, however, to be concealed from the reader that this life of effort and self-reproach was one of anything but happiness to Mortimer; every word uttered by his friend the Countess, which had reference to "other days," grated upon his ears; and his repentance for having brought her into such immediate contact with his young wife encreased hourly, from the second or third day after their domestication in Worcestershire.

Francis Blocksford, the lady's son, remained only a short time at Sadgrove. His object being to see England previous to entering at Oxford, of which university he was destined to become a future ornament, he proceeded, after a brief sojourn, to London, where his uncle was residing, and to whose care he was consigned. Ridiculous as it may appear, and unaccountable as it may seem, Mortimer felt pleased at his departure. He was a graceful, handsome fellow, and, although not more than seventeen, a French education had given him the air of

the "world," and Helen was pleased with him and liked him, and his high spirits made them all laugh, and his good humour made them enjoy his conversation; but the affection and admiration of Colonel Mortimer were not altogether unqualified by a restlessness which, if he had not been ashamed of the admission, he might almost have fancied jealousy.

He was gone, however, leaving his "dear Mrs. Mortimer" two of his drawings—for as an artist, *inter alia*, he excelled; — and they were framed and hung up in her boudoir. One was a view of Sadgrove; the other a view of the Chateau de St. Alme, near Blois, the seat of his most amiable and domestic father-in-law, which the Mortimers had visited during their excursion to Tours.

Upon what little things great things turn. These drawings, and their hanging up, were not much in themselves, but—

Well! the answers to the numerous invitations to shooting and all other sports were received, and all in the affirmative: the house would be thronged, and gaiety would reign

universally, the spirit to invigorate and enliven the ball being, as the wine-merchants say of Madeira, all "London particular;" and Mortimer rejoiced while he felt not only that the dulness of Sadgrove but the particular intimacy of his wife and the Countess St. Alme would be broken in upon.

One answer which was received to these biddings we ought to give, inasmuch as it may serve to let the reader into another portion of our story, for which, however, he has in some degree been prepared. Ecce!

Grosvenor Street.
Oct. 18—

"DEAREST HELEN,

"Nothing in this world can give me greater pleasure than accepting your and Mortimer's invitation to Sadgrove. Tell him, I like flint guns still; I may be wrong, but I tried caps and they brought on a degree of deafness: the sharp snap produces this. I will, however, not inflict upon him a poker, which, as you know but little of the country, I may be permitted to tell you such gentlemen as your husband call a single-barrelled gun.

"But now, Helen;—this *entre nous*—our confidences have lasted long, and have never been broken; — what do you think? — I want you to ask two other persons besides myself—inseparable from me now—Lady Melanie Thurston and her daughter—you remember them everywhere. Lady Melanie posted upon every sofa in the world with a sort of tiara on her brow, looking like "the figure-head of His Majesty's ship 'Fury,'—enough to make one sick,—pray, ask her,—she longs to go to you, —she lives at 136, Harley Street:—her daughter is nice—very nice—make Mortimer pleased with *her*. The old lady has a sort of western circuit of friends, and it would suit her very well; and I really do not see why we might not all go down together: — manage this.

"I was delighted, after your letter from Paris, to find that you were so soon coming home, and I hope you find Sadgrove all you expected and wished. I remember the Countess St. Alme as Mrs. Blocksford; she was extremely handsome, and was a daughter of an East-India Director, whose name I at this

moment forget — rather satirical — sharp — and so on; but if I don't mistake my Helen, she is a match for her, at that sort of play.

"I am vexed to hear that you don't think Mortimer well; as to his spirits, they fluctuate with the weather; naturally so, the more mercurial they are. As for what you say about shutting out the neighbours, let Mortimer do as he likes.

"I met poor Ellesmere the day before yesterday. I really believe you did him a mortal injury by refusing him: he seems an excellent person, and has been very much distinguished by a vote of thanks from some great county meeting for something wonderful that he has done. He is certainly not a Liberal in politics, but I believe he spends five or six thousand a year in doing good. I hope Magnus is agreeable, as I hear he is all in all with Mortimer: the affair at Mudbury has damaged him considerably in his importance, and, as I am told, stops a great deal of the swagger of his conversation; — he was certainly overreached there.

"As to uncle Jacob, he is unapproachable:

not one bit will he advance towards reconciliation; and I fear that all my expectations of an improvement in my affairs at his death, which, according to the law of Nature, however much I may lament the event, will probably take place before mine, will vanish into the 'levis aura.' However, dear child, you are well placed, and put beyond any difficulty of worldly circumstances — lucky for you. All I speculate upon is, what Jacob *will* eventually do with his wealth. To give it to anybody seems contrary to his principle, and to leave it to any great national establishment equally at variance with his love of self. One thing is quite clear — neither you nor I, nor Mortimer above all, have the slightest chance.

" Now then, Helen, do not forget Lady Melanie Thurston and her daughter. The infliction of a mother-in-law upon a lady who is herself a wife is not much: — and so the secret is out. You may tell it to Mortimer, and the world will know it before long:—and so recollect I cannot go to you without my friends.

" The enquiries after you by the few peo-

ple in London are really affectionate and kind; but, of course, we are but few at this time of the year. There are, I believe, about four or five hundred thousand nobodies jostling one another in the City every day, doing what they call 'business.' Brother Jacob amongst the number. But in *these* parts humanity is extremely scarce. Adieu! dear Helen: best regards to Mortimer, and believe me

"Affectionately yours,

"J. BATLEY."

"As I suspected," said Helen to herself— "my dear Pappy is going to marry again. Well, all *my* consolation is, that he did not favour me with a commander-in-chief while *I* was under his roof. Now we shall see what his choice *is*; and as I could by no possibility remember my own dear mother, that choice will give me an opportunity of judging of his taste. Thank Heaven! my chaperon, Lady Bembridge, is not the apple-getting goddess; for, knowing what I do of her, my poor Pappy, I am sure, would have been bored to death."

To Mortimer the contents of this letter were imparted, so far as concerned the special invitation, but the letter itself was not thrown down frankly and freely for his uncontrolled perusal: — such was the restraint which thus early in their union had been established, — only by manner, — over the young wife's conduct.

"Ask them?" said Mortimer,—"to be sure, my dear Helen. You know Lady Melanie Thurston and her daughter—have them down: — let your father be pleased and he pleases me: — besides that, Miss Thurston plays the harp exceedingly well—the only fault of which excellence is, her never knowing when to leave off. However, as music is always a charming excuse for general conversation, she will make it lively: — have them, by all means."

Everything promised gaiety, and Mortimer himself was gay, which was everything to Helen. The presence of Magnus, she felt, was a sort of weight upon her: he engrossed a good deal of her husband's society, and the solemn pomposity of his manner, and a sort of

command he evidently had over his host, acted as, what is generally understood in the world to be, a wet blanket. This, and a certain degree of assumption on the part of the Countess St. Alme, kept Helen in a kind of fever, although as Magnus, who was a great ally of the Countess, said, she had not only begun to bear with her, if not to like her, but was really amused by her vivacity, — all of which, be it recollected, (and it is never too early to date a feeling destined to rankle,) Mortimer attributed rather to her being the mother of the stripling Blocksford, than the friend of his earlier days.

The mind is mysteriously framed; and as no two countenances (which are the indices of minds) are alike, so no two minds exactly resemble each other. Mortimer, the once followed and worshipped idol of his day — *flétri* to a certain extent — and, being at forty-five or thereaway, a bridegroom, handsome beyond dispute in person, his manly beauty mellowed by time with tints which gave even better effects to his classical features, shrank with diffidence and suspicion from the bright beam-

ing countenance of a handsome young man who was his own godson! Ay, there it was! — the affection which he could not fail to feel for the son of the old and favourite friend of his youth, was "sullied o'er" with an envious jealousy of the personal attractions of that very individual, and in his mind the seed was sown. He heard Francis Blocksford talk of his own contemporaries as "old fellows of five-and-forty" — and "old chaps of fifty" — and this before his vivacious Helen, whose eyes, innocently enough, God knows! were fixed upon the ingenuous countenance of the young Frank, while he was unconsciously planting daggers in the heart of the more matured Mortimer. Ridiculous as this prejudice, — this littleness may appear, it was registered in the heart of the master of Sadgrove, and lay hidden smouldering under the heap of anxieties which swelled it, ready to burst into a flame upon the slightest provocation.

This incubus was removed, — this imaginary peril was gone, but even *then*, Mortimer seemed restored only to a negative degree of com-

placency. Magnus and he roamed about with gloom upon their countenances, and St. Alme in vain endeavoured to mingle in their morning strolls, before the time arrived for shooting. There was something altogether uncomfortable in the *ménage*, and what seemed to render it most uncomfortable of all was, as we have already seen, Mortimer's growing dislike of the perpetual association of his wife and the Countess.

"I don't think," said the Countess St. Alme to Helen upon one of these occasions, "that Mortimer seems as happy as he ought to be"——

The calling him Mortimer did not quite please Helen.

—"With *you*, my dear Helen."

That was not entirely agreeable.

—"He ought to be the happiest of men—his fortune adequate to every luxury of the world, and this place one of the nicest in the kingdom—and with a wife"——

"Oh! Countess," said Helen.

"I am perfectly sincere, my dear Mrs. Mor-

timer," said the Countess; "I cannot imagine anything wanting to make this place a perfect paradise."

"It *is* lovely," said Helen; "and I am so glad beyond all other things that we are not worried by the visits of the people about the county; they would bore me to death: and then their visits would be to be returned; and then we should have to have them here at dinner, and then have to go ten or fifteen miles through dark nights and bad roads to dine with *them*. I thought, before I was married, I should like to have them to go to, for the sake of laughing at them; but I am ten times better pleased as it is, especially as Francis is anxious to shut them out."

The Countess listened and looked, and wondered whether Helen were, in truth, unconscious of the real state of the case, at the same time half-inclined to enlighten her: upon this point, however, she thought better; and resolved to let her remain in a state of blissful ignorance, into which she could not but choose to wonder she had been left so long."

A few days, however, brought down the town-bred guests, and very soon all Sadgrove was filled with *les braves convives*, Lord William this, Sir Harry that, Colonel one thing, and Captain t'other thing, besides the Dowagers and the Misters, and the Honourable Mistresses, and the Lady Marys, and the Lady Janes, and the guns and the valets, and the maids and the men. Such a gathering never had been seen there, since the death of the late respected Algernon Mortimer, Esq., who slumbered in the family vault in the close-adjoining church, and whose sporting performances in other days were carried on in an extremely different manner, and whose domestic arrangements were wholly at variance with the present free and easy proceedings of his most amiable son and heir, now keeping "wassail" in the ancient hall of his ancestors.

And then to see how the neighbours turned up their eyes and lifted up their hands at the madcap pranks which the goodly company played. The boys of the village were delighted with the skill and agility of the

dandies, and the girls, especially the pretty ones, amazed at their condescension. The ladies made friends of all the cottagers, and pets innumerable were found amongst the neighbouring children. Everything was gaiety and benevolence, good-humour and hilarity, and nothing could be more charming than such gay doings at the mansion. But in the midst of all this there were eyes watching, and minds full of thought; and however gay and thoughtless the motley group of guests might be, the master of Sadgrove was still ill at ease.

"Mortimer," said the Countess St. Alme as Francis was driving her in a phaeton to see some coursing, "I am sure of one thing, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The abruptness of her manner startled her companion, who almost hated her for being the mother of his namesake.

"And why?" said Mortimer.

"You are jealous of your young wife," replied the vivacious lady, — "groundlessly jealous — but jealous you are; and besides

the ungenerous character of such a feeling, consider its consequences."

"Jealous!" said Mortimer — "ridiculous! And who is the cause of this dreadful excitement?" — and he trembled for her answer; so thoroughly did he despise himself for harbouring a feeling which he could not overcome, and yet dared not to avow.

"Oh! nobody in particular," said the Countess, "your Helen will never give you cause for *that* sort of jealousy: but you are jealous of the whole world — of every man that comes near her. I know every turn of your mind; you watch her when she speaks — when she looks. If she is talking to the most indifferent person in the room, you seem to haunt the spot where they are seated; if she stroll out of sight, even with my poor dear little ugly old husband, out you go and follow them: — now this is all wrong, Mortimer. If anything in the world can spoil a fine ingenuous character, such conduct as yours is sure to do it. Conscious of no ill intention, a young woman of high spirit and candid disposition cannot fail

to feel degraded and affronted by an implied suspicion of her conduct, implied too in a manner made evident to everybody with whom she happens to come in contact."

"You mistake me, Countess," said Mortimer. "I admit that I feel a strong anxiety about Helen in society, but not jealousy. She has a habit of saying things which cut and wound, and this half unintentionally: in fact, she does not know how to restrain herself — what she thinks she speaks; and now that she is mine, I feel a certain degree of responsibility: — I — in short, I am afraid of her committing herself."

"No, Mortimer," said the Countess, "'lay not that flattering unction to your soul.' Her frankness and ingenuousness were, as you have told me, what won you: it is *not* a fear that they should offend, but a dread lest they might please too much, that agitates you and keeps you like a troubled spirit hovering near her; — take my advice, — we have known each other long enough to give me that privilege, — do not let her fancy herself watched and suspected.

Poor Mr. Blocksford was addicted to something extremely like the course you are now pursuing,—it never answers, Mortimer."

The conclusion to which the Countess came, after citing her own case as one in point, was, to say the least of it, whimsical; and Mortimer could not resist observing that, since the Countess argued from experience, he would endeavour to check a habit of which she accused him, but of the existence of which he did not admit himself to be conscious.

To a man mistrustful of himself, rather than of his young and fascinating wife, nothing is so annoying as even the most frivolous allusions to the most trifling circumstances made by the early friends of the lady, they being persons who, for all the husband knows, might have been in other days *aspirants* for her hand.

"Do you remember," said Lord William, "my dear Mrs. Mortimer, that joke one evening at Lady Summerville's, about you and the pine-apple and the bouquet."

"Oh, perfectly," replied Mrs. Mortimer, "and you on your knees like Romeo in the garden."

"And the Ascot day," cried Sir Harry, "when three hearts were broken at one blow."

"I never shall forget that;" answered Mrs. Mortimer, laughing exceedingly, "and to see poor Lord Robert after the *éclaircissement*."

"That was altogether a most agreeable excursion, Helen," said the Honourable Mrs. Petherton, "I wonder you ever gave up blue ribands after those verses—don't you remember?"

"Oh! perfectly," replied Mrs. Mortimer, "I assure you I have got them perfectly safe, —for, to say truth, they were very pretty."

"Is poor Tom dead, Mrs. Mortimer?" pathetically asks Sir Harry.

"Oh dear no!" replies Mrs. Mortimer, "on the contrary he is in Italy, married, and, as the people say, well to do."

Now all these references to long by-gone nothings kept Mortimer upon the rack; the ease and gaiety with which Helen, who of course knew (which he did not) the real nature and character of the circumstances and incidents of which her friends were speaking, ap-

peared to him misplaced levity, and evidence of a frivolity which pained him; and then the whole scene between his avowed rival Ellesmere at Lady Saddington's, and Batley's letter of recall after he had taken his departure for the Continent recurred to his mind, and then, gazing with a mingled feeling of delight and doubt upon his laughing wife, he muttered to himself Lord Townley's opening question in the play, "Why did I marry?"

The arrival of Helen's father and his friends the Thurstons (mother and daughter) seemed a favourable epoch at which Mortimer should begin the correction of this scrutinizing habit; inasmuch as if, although Helen were yet unconscious of it, it were sufficiently evident to attract the notice of others, Batley would in all probability himself observe it. He, therefore, determined, for the next week at least, to banish all solicitude, and enjoy if possible the gaiety with which he had surrounded himself.

Batley, luckily, was in particularly high spirits, and seemed to be in the highest degree of favour with his ladies; and when Mr. John

chose to make the agreeable, nobody could better succeed:—as he was now avowedly on his promotion, there could be little doubt of the activity of his exertions.

"Do you think her pretty, Helen?" said Jack to his daughter, speaking of Miss Thurston.

"Ye-es!" said Helen, "pretty, but *gauche;* she seems always straining after effect;—her harp is agreeable, but there is no feeling—none of that soul-fraught energy which gives music and everything else its real value to *me.*"

"Come, come, Helen," said Batley, "recollect in her you see your future *belle mère*, and I must insist upon your duty."

"Rely upon me," said Helen. "And when is it to be, Pappy."

"Why the matter has not gone that length yet," said the matured lover; "I should say a few days now would settle it."

"But you are accepted, I presume," said Helen, with a kind of mock dignity and a patronising air.

"Oh!" said Jack, "that part of the story

is all understood. I have put the case hypothetically, and Laura and her mother are, as the people say, 'quite agreeable.' I think that our domestication here for the next week will afford the most favourable opportunity imaginable of concluding the negotiations, and it would be particularly agreeable to me to receive the hand of so amiable a person under the roof of her who has been so many years my companion and my delight;—*entre nous*, Helen,—not that I am worldly,—the young lady has forty thousand pounds, besides the reversion of Mamma's jointure when she dies."

"Why, you will be the envy of all the fortune-hunters in London!" said Helen.

"Lady Bembridge is in her airs about it," said Batley; "she fancied herself the object of my solicitude, but, as I say, Helen, a man is so much younger for his years than a woman, that it is but fair to make a due allowance. Mortimer and you, for instance, are admirably suited;—I,—to be sure, there *is* a difference between Mortimer's age and mine,

and I have what is erroneously called the advantage, but still Laura is older than *you*, and so that brings the matter all right.'"

"I wish," said Helen, "I could see Mortimer more lively; as I wrote to you, he seems to have something preying on his mind which affects him more particularly here."

"Shall I tell you, Helen?" said Jack: "I have always made your confidence with an implicit reliance on your natural good sense, and, in what I am going to say, I only afford an additional proof of my estimation of your character. You must not notice, nor care for, and especially not notice to him, or let him see that you *do* care for, the gloom about which you speak; it is connected with circumstances of other days:—tell me,—has he been to church yet?"

"No!" said Helen, opening her bright black eyes with an expression of wonder at the question which was so unexpected and yet so pertinent, "no! but what of that?—he has had a cold; besides, he went last week to Welsford church,—and last Sunday——"

"Hush, hush, my Helen!" said Batley, "never mind what other church he visits: I speak only of *this*. You know, for I told you before you married him, all the circumstances of his unfortunate affair with Lady Hillingdon?"

"Ah!" said Helen, and those fine eyes which erst brightened with surprise were raised to heaven with an expression of painful regret, "I thought of that, but—"

"Do not agitate yourself, my child," said Batley, "nor fancy that any recollection of Lady Hillingdon is to interfere with your entire happiness and comfort; all will be well in time; but I know (for Magnus has told me) the dread that Mortimer has of first visiting the church here,—under the family pew of the Mortimers lies buried the woman who sacrificed everything for him. In the human mind some one single circumstance of a long life stands registered deeply and firmly, from which the heart revolts as soon as it recurs. All the wrongs Mortimer did, all the sacrifices he made, all the punishment he has undergone, all the sorrows he has felt, are summed up and

concentered in that one spot, that one object. If he could muster sufficient resolution once to revisit that tomb, the spell would be broken, and by degrees he would even derive consolation from his visits to it."

"But, father," said Helen, "when you tell me this, do you expect *me* to derive consolation from the intelligence, or that my anxiety about Mortimer is likely to be decreased by knowing that his grief arises from the loss of one to whom I am the unworthy successor?"

"No, Helen, no!" said Batley, "you mistake the point of my observation upon his conduct. The struggle now going on in his mind is not between regret for his former wife and affection for you; the conflict is merely with regard to the one particular fact of what, in common parlance, is called 'breaking the ice.' Time will do this, but, as I tell you, I know the state of his feelings upon this particular point, and know also the dread he has of making a scene before the congregation which might result from an inconsiderate effort to master these feelings prematurely."

It must be confessed that Helen after this conversation was by no means more assured of the transient nature of Mortimer's grief than she was before it took place. In fact, she was conscious of an absence of that entirety of affection which, with all her characteristic enthusiasm, she had anticipated in marrying the man of her heart; and, although her father might have arrived at a time of life when mere worldly considerations are supposed to influence what the Morning Post would call the "votaries of Hymen," she felt rather sorry than pleased that her vernal parent had given her so sad a clue to the abstraction of her absent husband.

Batley, however, rallied her into a smiling humour, and left her to dress, with an injunction not to take the slightest notice of Mortimer's melancholy or its cause; and, added he, as he whisked himself out of his daughter's boudoir, "Don't make a particular *confidante* of the Countess St. Alme."

This last hint, coupled with the tone of the Countess's *innuendoes* as to Mortimer, sent

Helen to her dressing-room with thoughts and feelings which ought not to fill the bosom of a noble-minded girl less than three months married.

CHAPTER IX.

The conversation which Helen had held with her animated parent was by no means calculated to tranquillize her mind. As far as expounding to her the cause of Mortimer's gloom and restlessness, it was, however, to a certain extent, satisfactory; for although a knowledge of the strength of his feelings for another, might not be particularly gratifying, still it relieved her from all apprehension that *she* was herself the cause of his melancholy and disorder.

Her father's caution about the Countess troubled her: she had, to please and gratify Francis, forced herself to like her; she had become familiarized with the *brusquerie* and abruptness of her manner; and if she had not made her a *confidante*, she felt no dislike to her

society. Once or twice, when speaking of Mortimer, Helen thought she perceived a desire on *her* part to refer more particularly to the history of his early life than was either necessary or agreeable, and an expression of wonder why he should permit the recollection of the past to mar the brightness of the present.

"*My* course," said Helen to herself, "is clear: doing no wrong, what have I to apprehend? This sadness of Mortimer's will wear off in time: I will neither question him about it, nor even appear conscious of its existence, but endeavour, by making everything around us as gay and cheerful as possible, to rescue him, as I hope, from its influence."

This admirable and wise determination, however, was more difficult of execution than Helen, in the innocence of her heart, imagined. Even the vivacious society of her father, which was particularly agreeable to Mortimer, failed of producing its wonted effect; his mirth seemed misplaced; his "gallant, gay" proceedings now appeared to Mortimer almost ridiculous; and he felt an awkwardness, — a difference,

in fact,—in the mode and topics of their conversations, which, unlike their intercourse in other days, were seldom reduced to a *tête-à-tête.* Jack, who was sufficiently quick and alive to passing circumstances, saw the change, and felt it; but attributing it to the one "great cause" which he had established in his mind, and communicated to Helen, it had but little effect upon him, and he rattled and flirted and fluttered away, with more than his usual activity.

"Pray, Helen," said Mortimer, "as I presume you to be in your father's confidence, which of the two ladies down here under his patronage is the object of his ambition — the mother or the daughter?"

"How *can* you ask, my dear Francis?" said Helen. "If my dear Pappy were to hear you imagine a doubt, he would die of the shock: — the daughter, to be sure."

"Oh!" replied Mortimer — "then he is not so wise a person as I supposed: — true, the mother's jointure reverts to Miss Laura at her death, but ——"

"Laura," said Helen, "is not so young as she looks, and I think will make a very respectable mother-in-law."

"I think her detestable!" said Mortimer. "Flippancy and pertness in a woman are qualified in a certain degree by youth and beauty; but when the one is past, and the other does not exist, an off-hand tone of superiority, such as Miss Thurston thinks proper to assume, is, at least to *me*, exceedingly offensive."

"Her mistake is excusable, Francis, even upon your own principle," said Helen; "for she does not consider herself old, nor think herself plain."

"Well," said Mortimer, "self-deception is a vice, or folly,—whichever you please,—of a most extensive character, if a woman of *her* age and appearance can still believe herself what she so decidedly is not. I confess, if for my sins I were condemned to be chained to either of them, the dowager would be my choice."

"Papa," said Helen, "prefers the lesser evil."

"Evil, indeed!" said Mortimer with a sigh, and then relapsed into one of those fits of abstraction, from which Helen did not venture to awaken him.

"I shall not shoot to-day," said Francis after a pause of a few minutes; "Magnus and I are going to ride over to Worcester. I will go, however, before we start, and make arrangements for those who like to go out, and you will make your party for the morning as you please."

"Are you going on business, Francis?" said Helen.

"Why, yes," replied Francis, "partly on business,—but we shall be back long before dinner; so try and live without me for a few hours."

These words, accompanied as they were by a "chaste salute," were delivered in a tone by no means agreeable to Helen's ear; and what made them still less acceptable was, that by an almost unconscious feeling they became mysteriously associated in her mind with the conversation she had had with the Countess St.

Alme, as to Francis's insensibility to the value of the treasure which he possessed in *her*."

"I will try," said Helen; "but, dear Francis, it will be a trial, for when can I be so happy here as when you are here too."

"Ha, ha!" said Francis, "you are a dear, good girl, and, if the world does not spoil you, will mellow down into a most domestic wife: —only," added he, "don't cry; don't dim those bright black eyes by weeping, even if Magnus and I *should* be too late for dinner. I should have felt some compunctious visitings in leaving you to manage the wide world of a country-house 'all alone by yourself,' but as 'Pappy,' as you call him, is here, he will relieve you from all that embarrassment; he can make himself 'at home' anywhere."

And the tone in which *these* words were spoken was not harmonious. The remarks of the Countess again flashed into her mind.— "What on earth has made him dissatisfied with me or my father?" thought Helen. "My father is a cleverer man than Francis; my father is"——

Hold, temper, hold! Has the adored Mortimer, the admired of all admirers, already sunk thus in the estimation of his wife? It is not doubt of his affection that has produced all this; it is, first, an air of command which he has assumed, a superiority which a woman of ardent mind and feelings cannot brook; this combined with his abstraction and grief — and all this again with the Countess's observations — and all this again and again with her father's injunction, not to make a confidante of the Countess. Well! ——

"Yes, Francis," said Helen, "my father *is* a very agreeable person, and you always thought him so; and I believe your first beginning to like *me* was, because you esteemed and admired *him*; that is my pride and pleasure."

"Who upon earth, Helen, said or thought I did not!" said Mortimer. "I merely observed, — and unless you were disposed to quarrel, my observation would have passed unnoticed except by a laugh, that your father made himself at home everywhere. I meant nothing offensive; and certainly, if there be

any house in England where he may do that most effectively, it is in *this*, where his daughter is mistress, and rules all hearts."

Again, the sneering manner of Francis worried Helen, but she felt herself above the influence of anger — she never *had* felt anger towards Francis — and above the reach of anything, strange to say! except the observation of the Countess St. Alme, — "He does not value you; he does not know the worth of the treasure he possesses."

Poor Helen ran over in her mind all the things she had said and done which could have been likely to excite Mortimer's ill-temper, of which she began to fear he possessed somewhat more than an average quantity, but she could tax herself with nothing. Did her liveliness offend him? — impossible! because he himself had spoken, if not harshly, at least strongly, as to his suspicions that the liveliness of the Countess St. Alme was objectionable to *her*. She had been civil to his friends and guests; she had, and he knew her motive, endeavoured to make the place gay; nor did

he exhibit anything but the greatest kindness to her in company,—as we have already said, perhaps a somewhat too watchful kindness in its way. The real misfortune of the match was,—and she began to discover it thus soon, however much too late it might be,—that Mortimer, who as a "dandy" of some twenty years before had established a character for talent and accomplishment, founded chiefly upon buoyant spirits and a fine person, did not, in point of fact, however much he might deceive himself into the belief that he did, possess one single attribute likely to attract or chain a mind like Helen's.

Well then, when to this unfortunate incongruity and want of sympathy were superadded the gnawing regret and cankering remorse, on the part of Mortimer, for deeds of other days, it did not seem very unnatural that he — also too late — discovered that his project for reform and regeneration, into a new life of domestic happiness and respectability, was not so likely to turn out well as he had anticipated. There certainly was something in his

manner as he left Helen upon this occasion which was painful in the extreme to her.

What still increased this feeling, — although she dreaded to inquire or know more of the cause of his strange behaviour than developed themselves so disagreeably on the surface, — was, the admonition of her father as to the Countess, who certainly had excited *a* feeling in Helen's breast, not perhaps a strong one, by throwing out hints that Mortimer was not so happy as he ought to be in his domestic circle. Helen resolved to dress her bright beautiful countenance in smiles; and when she rejoined the party nobody could have guessed what was passing in her mind, unless perhaps it was the Countess St. Alme herself, who, when the mistress of the mansion announced that its master was going on an excursion that morning, accompanied by Colonel Magnus, and that she should be sole monarch of the day, gave her a look which she felt was understood, and which implied that even with a host of friends about him there was something more attractive out of Sadgrove than in

it. Helen saw the glance, and felt its import and influence; but dashing away the black ringlets from her snowy forehead, as if typical of casting from her mind all dark thoughts, she turned from the scrutinizing eye of the more than half Frenchwoman to the smiling countenances of her other visiters, in order to make the essential arrangements for putting them all into motion in the most agreeable possible manner to themselves.

Batley, as far as he was concerned, proposed having the negative satisfaction of remaining "at home;" for, according to Mortimer's just view of his character, so did he designate Sadgrove. Helen soon discovered his reason for this announcement of his domestication; Laura Thurston had got the head-ache,—Lady Melanie would stay with her. Batley saw in the head-ache a *ruse*, because, Batley's own ways being tortuous, he never believed that anybody ever said or did anything without a motive. He had expressed a sort of half intention at breakfast of not shooting,—Laura after breakfast had a head-ache,—"put that and that

together," (as the wicked woman said to the red-nosed Justice, it makes something,) and, accordingly, Batley, the Evergreen Batley, found, in the sudden announcement of the young lady's (young perhaps by courtesy) painful malady, more of sympathy than sickness, and that she had merely fashioned her complaint to the purpose of the moment, and having, as he conceived, previously given sundry indications of a desire to come to an explanation of his views and intentions, considered that day, when he was not to be out, a fitting opportunity for him to make his declaration.

There is nothing in the world so curious to look at as the mind of a cunning man, — not a conjurer, but a man who thinks he is carrying on his schemes, and manœuvring and keeping everybody else in the dark as to his designs and intentions. Addison says that "cunning is only the mimic of discretion, and may pass upon weak men, in the same manner as vivacity is often mistaken for wit, and gravity for wisdom." When Batley heard of the head-ache, his cunning made him certain of his point, and

he smirked and simpered proportionably; although, in fact, whatever might have been Miss Thurston's opinion of, and feelings towards him, the poor thing had a real *bonâ fidê* head-ache. Batley's own constant practice of the art in which he thought himself an adept, and in the exercise of which he preferred getting at an easily attained object by a circuitous road than by a short one, convinced him that this was a plan, that the heart of the lady was more affected than the head, and that this day was to be *the* day "big with the fate" of himself and Laura.

What the object of Mortimer's visit to Worcester might be, Helen no further sought to know; nor would she have cared about it, but for the look of *that* Countess who became a greater object of interest in her eyes since Pappy had warned her, not to make a friend of her.

There is an old story, which has been very often told, of a man, probably something like Mortimer, who had married a girl something like Helen, and who had a friend probably

something like Magnus, and the friend was sceptical somewhat as to the obedient tendency of the young wife's disposition, much to the dissatisfaction of the Benedick, who strongly asserted and warmly asseverated that his will was law, and that she never by any chance disobeyed any wish or injunction of his.

"Have you ever tried her temper in that respect?" said the friend: "have you ever positively desired her not to do any particular thing? for *that* is my point, since you tell me she never refuses to do whatever you desire her to do."

"No!" said the affectionate husband, "I never have found occasion to desire her *not* to do anything, but—"

"That's it! as the old women say," cried the friend, "female obedience is proved by negatives; tell her *not* to do any particular thing, give her no particular reason why, and see if she does not do it."

"Ridiculous!" says the husband.

"Try!" says the friend.

"Well," replies the husband, "agreed!

we are both going away for the day:"—just as Mortimer and Magnus were,—"what proof shall I put her to? what shall I tell her not to do? may she not play her harp? must she not sing, or draw? or, in fact, tell me what you want me to prohibit her doing, and I stake my life she does it not."

"Oh no!" said the friend, "drawing, and singing, and playing the harp are things which she might abstain from without a murmur, or, what is more essential to the affair, a wonder; because she has sung, and played, and drawn a thousand times; it is an injunction not to do something *she never has done before*,—for instance, tell her when we go, not to climb some particular hill, for particular reasons which you do not choose to give her; or, by way of carrying the principle out to its fullest extent, warn her not to attempt to ride on Neptune's back."

"Neptune's back!" said the husband.

"Yes!" replied the friend, "on the back of this most valued Newfoundland dog, the bravest and faithfullest of his breed."

"Ride on a dog's back!" exclaimed Benedick, "how *can* you be so absurd?—as if——"

"Ah! there it is," said the friend, "as if,—now, take my word for it, if you issue the injunction without giving her any reason, Harriet will break it."

The most incredulous of men rejoiced at the idea, which he felicitously ridiculed, and resolved upon trying the experiment in order to establish his Harriet's superiority of mind, and his friend's exceeding silliness.

He parted from his Harriet, and with tender fondness she clung round his shoulder, as he said in quitting her,

"Harriet, dearest, we have seldom been separated since our marriage,—I shall be back soon—take care of yourself, love,—but, just attend to one thing I am going to say dear, don't try to ride upon Neptune's back while we are away."

"What!" said the laughing Harriet, "ride upon Neptune,—ha, ha, ha! what an odd idea!—is that all you warn me against?—why, what

a ridiculous notion! why should you tell me that? What nonsense!"

"That, my dear," said the husband, "is a secret; all I beg of you is, not to ride upon Neptune."

"Ride upon Neptune!" repeated the lady, and she laughed again, and they parted.

When Benedick and his friend returned to dinner, the laughing Harriet did not as usual present herself to receive them; there was a sort of gloom pervading the house; the footman who opened the door looked dull; the butler who came into the hall looked as white as his waistcoat; the lady's own maid rushed down stairs evidently to prevent a scene.

"Where is your mistress?" said Benedick.

"Up-stairs, sir!" said the maid, "there is nothing the matter, sir,—nothing in the world, sir,—only my mistress has had a fall,—quite a little fall on the walk in the flower garden,—and has cut her face, the least bit in the world, sir; all will be well in a couple of days.

"A fall!" said Benedick.

"Humph!" said his friend.

And up-stairs ran the anxious husband.

"What has happened?" exclaimed he, catching her to his heart, and seeing her beautiful countenance a little marred,—"how did this happen?"

Harriet cried, and hid her face.

The explanation never came altogether clearly before the friend or the family; but the accident was generally thought to have arisen from Harriet's having endeavoured to take a ride upon Neptune's back.

The Countess St. Alme was the Neptune of Sadgrove; the warning Helen had received, coupled with the other odd circumstances which have been already noticed, excited the fated lady of the mansion to increase rather than diminish the intimacy which already existed between them; and, resolving to lose no time in ascertaining the justice of the paternal admonition, proposed, as one of the arrangements of that very morning, to drive the Countess in the pony phaeton herself.

Thus while the daughter had determined to try the temper of her friend, the father

had decided to essay his fortune with the object of his choice; and a very nice morning's work it was, all things considered.

There is an axiom, for the perfect truth of which every living man and many living women can safely vouch; and this axiom says quaintly enough "Wrong never comes right." No community in the known world could be better cited in illustration of its wisdom than the little circle at Sadgrove; the errors and indiscretions of foregone days cast their baleful influence over even the healthiest branches of the family tree; and as it is invariably the case that one falsehood begets ten thousand, so the delicacies and difficulties connected with the occurrences of Mortimer's earlier life led to a series of little tricks and unworthy manœuvres which were considered necessary to keep the blemishes out of sight.

The drive, however, took place; and Mrs Mortimer, having parcelled out her party, and paired those who wished to be together, with all the *bienséance* of London life, started with her friend on their little expedition.

"What," said the Countess, "has taken Francis to Worcester?"

The recurrence of her husband's christian name in the conversation of her fair friend at all times sounded harsh and discordant, and to-day particularly so; probably, because the time and manner in which the question was put seemed almost indescribably to tally with the spirit and expression of Mortimer's remarks upon her father previous to his departure.

"I have not an idea," said Helen; "I never presume to enquire into his proceedings."

"I suppose he and his *friend*" (with a particular emphasis) "have some very interesting engagement."

"I believe they are gone on business," said Helen, wishing to stop the course of the enquiry, which, although she disdained to show it, agitated and annoyed her.

"What business they can have at Worcester," said the Countess, "except to buy you a service of porcelain, a packet of gloves, or a pocket of hops, I cannot guess: perhaps they are gone to visit some friend of other days. By

the way, dear—did Francis ever show you his picture of Amelia?—it was a wonderfully fine likeness.

"No!" said Helen, and her voice faltered,—she thought the question rather extraordinary, and strangely timed; she was not surprised that he never *had* shown it to her, and yet now she felt discontented that he had not, since he knew she was aware of all the circumstances connected with his first marriage.

"You have seen her monument, Helen," said the Countess.

"No!" said Helen.

"It is immediately at the back of your pew," said the Countess; "I wonder you never noticed it."

"I seldom notice anything at church, Countess," said Helen.

"Oh!" replied the Countess, "I am quite aware of your devotion, of the abstraction which it induces, and all that; but I should have thought you would have felt an interest in looking at *that*, apart from idle curiosity:—shall we go there now?—do,—I should like

you to see it; it is in the best possible taste, and I think Francis will be pleased to know that you have seen it."

Helen was extremely puzzled how to act; she felt a dread of complying with her companion's suggestions, and a fear of opposing them. She thought she should like to see the monument, but she thought that Francis would be displeased by her visiting it with the Countess, or rather, without *him*, since he had never referred to the subject which, nevertheless, she was told, was nearest his heart.

"No!" said Helen; "I differ with you there Countess; if Mortimer wished me to see the monument, he would either have spoken of it to me, or shown it me himself."

"He would give the world to do so," said the Countess, "but he cannot muster sufficient resolution to look at it; if once that struggle were over, he would again visit the church as usual, his absence from which is not calculated to allay the prejudice which exists against him in the neighbourhood.

"Is there a prejudice against him?" said

Helen, listening with fearful anxiety to her companion, who seemed of late to take especial pleasure in detracting from Mortimer's merits.

"Prejudice!" said the Countess; "why, my dear Helen, you are not blind to that? what else makes Sadgrove as much a desert as it was in the time of its late mistress? not one of the county people come near it."

"No!" said Helen, "because Mortimer declines their society, which bores him, and prefers *that* in which he delights."

"And does he really make you believe all this?" said the Countess: "pray, my dear girl, how has he manifested his disinclination to receive them in his house? have they ever made any advances for him to repulse?"

"As for *my* part," said Helen, "I hate neighbours, and I hate travelling about to dull distant dinners and dowdy dances,—so I have told him, and for that reason——"

"—He would no doubt decline the civilities of the county people," said the Countess, "*if* they were offered; but no—even the family of the clergyman, so much here as *he* is on business with

Francis, have confined their attentions to a call when they were certain you were out, which you and I returned when they were not at home."

"I know," said Helen, "Francis told me, he thought it best not to invite them here."

"—Because," said the Countess St. Alme, "he could not have borne the mortification of a negative answer."

"Not the least!" exclaimed Helen, in a vindicatory tone; "they would be too happy to come, but he thought it better to postpone the invitation till some of our London guests were gone, and *that*, partly at my suggestion; for I declare, good as he is, and all that sort of thing, there is something so eminently absurd in the countenance of the worthy doctor, that I dread a day of them."

"Well, then!" said the Countess, "you will not go to see the tomb this morning?"

"No!" said Helen, "on Sunday after church I will look at it, and will tell Francis that I *have* looked at it; I have no disguises from *him*."

"Poor dear girl!" said the Countess, in a

tone which could not be mistaken: — "here, I declare, is your most excellent parent and the Thurstons taking a particularly domestic-looking ride, after all the history of the head-ache and staying at home, — it would be the height of barbarity to join them, therefore turn short to the left, down this lane, and leave them to their interesting conversation."

Helen did as she was bid, not that she would have been at all sorry if the interesting conversation in which she herself was engaged with her companion had been put an end to. As, however, she felt that it would, "under existing circumstances," be more agreeable to her father to be left with his companions to pursue their ramble, the ponies were wheeled round and trotted away as fast as they could patter along a beautifully wooded road which Helen had never before traversed. Emerging from the trees which shaded the first part of it, they came upon a sort of terrace cut along the side of a gently rising hill and overhanging the Severn, which rippled and glittered at their feet most beautifully.

"What an extremely pretty drive!" said Helen. "I think our meeting papa was quite a fortunate event, since it sent us in this direction."

"Have you never been this road before?" said the Countess.

"No," replied Helen, "I seldom attempt to explore; I keep the beaten tracks."

"—But did Francis never bring you this way?" said the Countess.

"No," replied Helen.

"You surprise me," said the Countess;—"but, to be sure, it is all part of the same delusion. Drive on, and when we come to that gate on the left you must turn in, and you will see one of the prettiest spots in the whole of Sadgrove."

Helen again obeyed the instructions of her guide; and when they reached the gate, and the servant rode forward to open it, the Countess, whose free and easy manner in commanding every member of the household was more remarkable than agreeable to Mrs. Mortimer,

enquired of the man, "if he knew where the key was?"

"They keep it, my lady," said the man, "at Willis's farm-house."

"Go forward then, and get it," said the Countess, "and we will drive round by the shrubbery and meet you."

A touch of the brim of his hat was Stephens's practical reply, and off he cantered towards Willis's farm.

"What place are we going to?" said Helen, who saw directly that it must be some very well known *endroit*, from the manner in which its key was spoken of, and the knowledge which the man possessed as to the place of its keeping.

"I'll not tell you till you see it, dear," said the Countess; "I like to surprise people sometimes. Go on — drive gently — and here to the right, into that copse, and down this *tonnelle* — it is rather steep: — but is it not charming, — those little glimpses of the river shining through the underwood? — Now, now

to the left — and there!" exclaimed the Countess in a tone of ecstasy, as the little phaeton stood in front of a picturesque building which she announced to Helen as "The Fishing-House."

So well did the Countess know the country, that Stephens, and an old woman from Willis's farm with the key of this Fishing-House, reached the spot at the moment of their arrival. With curtsies most respectful, and that flurry which an unexpected visit always causes in humble life, the poor old body, with trembling hand, applied the key to the door.

"I am so sorry, madam," said she: "this is almost the only day this year I haven't regularly opened the Fishing-House in the morning; but to-day — dear, dear me — I am so sorry! I won't be a minute opening the shutters, — deary me!"

"Oh!" said the Countess, who always took the lead, "don't hurry yourself, we will get out of the carriage and walk round to the terrace, and by that time you will have got it all ready for us. Come, Helen, dear, — let us

leave the phaeton here, and I will take you through the prettiest flower-garden in all the world."

Helen wondered, but almost instinctively obeyed her guest.

"How extremely beautiful this is!" said Helen.

"I thought you would admire it," said the Countess. "Come—this way."

And she led her through one of the sweetest and gayest parterres that ever bloomed, to a straight terrace-walk of no great extent, but which led to what might be considered the front entrance of the building. By the time they had reached it, the poor old body had got the shutters opened, and was assiduously employed in dusting this and putting right that, labouring under all the horrors of an imputation of neglect of duty.

The Fishing-House consisted of a circular room divided into six compartments, in three of which were windows overhanging the river. In the one opposite to the centre window was a fire-place; on either side of which, occupying

the remaining two compartments, was a door; one led to a kitchen and offices, and the other to a suite of apartments containing a sleeping-room, and a boudoir or dressing-room, as the case might be. The view from it was exquisite, and there was a brightness and a clearness sparkling around it, and a stillness and serenity within it, which might have made the greatest and gayest sigh and say,

——"If there's peace to be found in the world,
A heart that is humble might hope for it here."

But no: — the repose and tranquillity which its natural attributes offered to its visiters were destined neither for humble hearts nor proud ones. The thatch which covered this "gentility-aping" cottage, as Mr. Southey has it, was a mere superficial coating to its well-slated roof, and as little indicated the residence of happiness within, as the humble bearing of its master towards his dependents exhibited the real temper of his mind. The place was lovely — the furniture and decorations, though appropriate, elegant and convenient;

and as Helen cast her eyes around it, the Countess whispered,——

"Is it not strange that you should not have been here before?"

"Does it belong to Francis?" said Helen.

"Belong to him!" said the Countess, "why, my dear love, it used to be his principal residence when ——"

"—I understand," said Helen, who thought she observed the old woman somewhat attentively listening to the remarks of the Countess.

"I concluded you had been here," said the amiable lady, "or I should have proposed a drive hither a week ago."

"No," said Helen, feeling her cheeks burn with humiliation that she should have been indebted to her friend for the induction into so lovely and so popular a portion of her domain.

The Countess saw what was passing in Helen's mind.

"Why, my dear," said she, "this used to be the favourite retreat of her who is gone; and here Francis and she passed, during the summer months, the greatest portion of their time:

indeed, the view which it commands is so much more beautiful and extensive than that from the house, that to one to whom seclusion was natural it must have been extremely agreeable."

"It *is* beautiful!" said Helen.

"Since you were here last, ma'am," said the old woman addressing the Countess, "*my* old man has cut down them two larches there at the end of the walk, which lets in the view of the church tower, as you said it would."

"Yes," said the Countess, looking remarkably confused, "Yes—I recollect—yes—it is a great improvement."

"We did not expect to see you so soon again, ma'am," continued the unsophisticated rustic, "or we would have had that hedge-row clipped, as you desired."

"Oh!" said the Countess, "it looks very well as it is."

"What!" said Helen, "have you been here lately?"

"About —how long is it since?" said the Countess to the old woman.

"Thursday-week, I think, ma'am," replied the rustic:—and had she gone no farther, all might have been extremely well; but the rustic added,—"and then Mr. Mortimer said, he did not think he should be here again till next Saturday."

Helen heard all this, and felt her head whirl, her eyes swimming, and her tongue clinging to the roof of her mouth. What! had Mortimer, who dared not venture to take *her* to this favourite retreat of his former wife, brought the Countess hither, and not one syllable said of the visit,—no, nor even of the existence of the Fishing-House itself.

"—But," continued the old body, "if you wish, ma'am, to have those curtains which I showed you, put up, instead of the crimson ones, they can be done in three or four days."

What! ordering furniture—making arrangements—giving directions!—Helen could bear this no longer: the spirit was roused.

"Pray," said Helen, firing up, her cheeks

dyed with the hot blood of indignation,— "pray, for whom do you take this lady?"

"Mrs. Mortimer—my master's wife," said the simple body, who, although she had partaken of the roasted sheep, and of the flowing ale, on the festive day, had never—probably from the potency of her imbibitions of the latter article—made herself sufficiently acquainted with the person of the squire's new lady to recognize her on her second appearance, and who, being one of those humble grubs who in the midst of their work have no time left to be vivacious, considered as a matter of course that the lady who came in Mr. Mortimer's phaeton to Mr. Mortimer's Fishing-House so soon after his return to Sadgrove with his new wife, was that happy individual.

"How very ridiculous!" said the Countess: —"why, my good woman, *this* lady is Mrs. Mortimer!"

"Dear, dear, deary me!" said the poor old body, looking at the Countess with an expression in her countenance indicating a sort of fear that she had made some most serious blunder.

"I wonder, as you see us at church," said the Countess, "that you should not have known."

"— Dear, dear, dear!" said the old woman, "I 'm sure, ma'am, I beg a thousand pardons! — I hope, ma'am, you won't be offended with me."

"Not in the least," said Helen with a toss of her head; "the mistake seems to me the most natural in the world."

"There," said the Countess, "you may go; —we will walk round the terrace."

The Countess saw that the fire had been kindled, which it would take some time to deaden; and as she did not wish even so humble a personage as the old body from Willis's farm to be a spectator of the scene she anticipated, she despatched her as speedily as possible.

Helen said nothing, but she felt as if she were dying,—and die she would, she resolved, before one single symptom of what was passing in her mind should exhibit itself.

"What a curious *contretemps*," said the

Countess,—"it always happens so: now, I am sure, Helen dear, it must seem extremely odd to you that Francis and I should have been here together, and that you should not even know of the existence of this beautiful retreat:" the truth is, we had a design upon you, and it is *my* fault that it has failed. We came here to give directions that it should be all put in nice order to surprise you; and my impression was, that all the arrangements had been made, but these stupid people——"

"Countess," said Helen, shaking the tear-drops which, spite of her resolution, stood upon her long black lashes, "I am not pleased with surprises like this. If Francis could not bear to revisit this favourite retreat with *me*, what circumstances rendered it less irksome to come hither with *you*? Of what use was the concealment which kept from my knowledge the very existence of such a retreat? The place has no charms for me except those which it derives from Nature, and the fact that it belongs to my husband. I could have felt no difficulty in visiting it; no painful associations

in my mind were connected with it; and nothing but common delicacy could have been necessary to have kept me from thinking of it as my own loved place of rest.

"Dear Helen," said the Countess, "I am quite aware how easy it is to render by a combination of circumstances the simplest and most innocent of our actions suspicious if not odious. It was I, who rallied Francis upon his gloom, and told him how much better it would be if he at once resolved to familiarize himself with the scenes of other days, and visit those favourite spots in which he had passed so much of his time:—this was one—he declared the utter impossibility of his ever seeing it again. I persuaded,—entreated him for *your* sake to come hither, and at last succeeded in prevailing upon him to do so. I further gave such directions to the woman here as might as much as possible alter its general appearance from what it formerly was, and hence at his own suggestion the change of furniture and other arrangements: why this poor woman should have mistaken *me* for *you*, it is impossible for

me to surmise, except that she happens to be particularly stupid."

"I am quite satisfied," said Helen; "only I *do* think that if the task of obliterating past recollections were to be assigned to any one, the wife of him who——"

"—No!" interrupted the Countess, "not in this peculiar case. Mortimer's mind is a very curious one; I have known it from his youth. To you he feels he cannot speak on this matter: he is even ignorant how far your knowledge of the circumstances connected with the affair extends. He considers it impracticable—impossible to touch upon the question; most of all upon its details, all of which must have been involved in your conversation with him if you had visited this place together without some preparation."

"Could he not have come hither alone?" said Helen.

"He never *would* have come hither alone," replied the Countess; "and you are indebted, my dear Helen, to *me* for the recovery of this lovely bower."

"I could have lived without it," said Helen mournfully, — "and better so, than have recovered it thus."

"I have but one condition to make with you," said the Countess, — "that you will not mention one word to François of our visit here to-day."

"Why so?" said Helen, — "more disguises, more hypocrisy! why, Countess, why am I doomed to live a life of dissimulation which I abhor and detest?"

"You do not know his temper," said the Countess; "if he knew that I had anticipated the arrangements we proposed, and frustrated his design, he would be outrageous."

"Then why, why," said Helen, "did you bring me hither? If my husband, to whom my heart is open as the day, can keep so closely hidden from *me*, thoughts and actions having reference to comparatively trifling matters like these, what confidence — what security can I have that I am trusted at all?"

"What then," said the Countess, "if everything goes on smoothly and the days pass hap-

pily, it matters little whether you know all that occupies your husband's mind!"

"Oh, Countess, Countess!" said Helen, "if that had been my creed, I never would have become a wife. I am sure," added she, "that in all that has happened about this place, which, beautiful as it is, I now shall hate, you are not to blame; but I think *I* should be very much to blame if I permitted this evening to pass over my head without telling Mortimer that I had been here, and all I know upon the subject."

"Do as you like, my dear Helen," said the Countess: "judge for yourself; I only spoke of expedience, and from a fear of irritating Mortimer."

"—How can he be irritated," said Helen, "by my coming hither if he were so anxious to prepare the cottage for my reception?"

"I repeat, dear Helen," said the Countess, "I have done. I think I might have been indiscreet in anticipating him in the pleasure he proposed to himself in showing you the place; it remains entirely for you to adopt

whatever course you think proper; only acquit me of any unfair motives. I only say, I have known Mortimer longer than you have, and have hoped since I have been here to restore him to himself and you, from whom he seems to me so much estranged."

The conversation here subsided into a calm; but Helen's heart was bursting. The Countess appeared at once to dismiss the whole affair from her mind; and, after a kind of restless nervous walk, or rather saunter along the terrace, the ladies remounted the phaeton and returned to the "Hall," not much having been said on the road homeward by either, as to the adventure of the Fishing-House, or indeed anything else. What had been doing at Sadgrove during their absence we shall see hereafter.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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